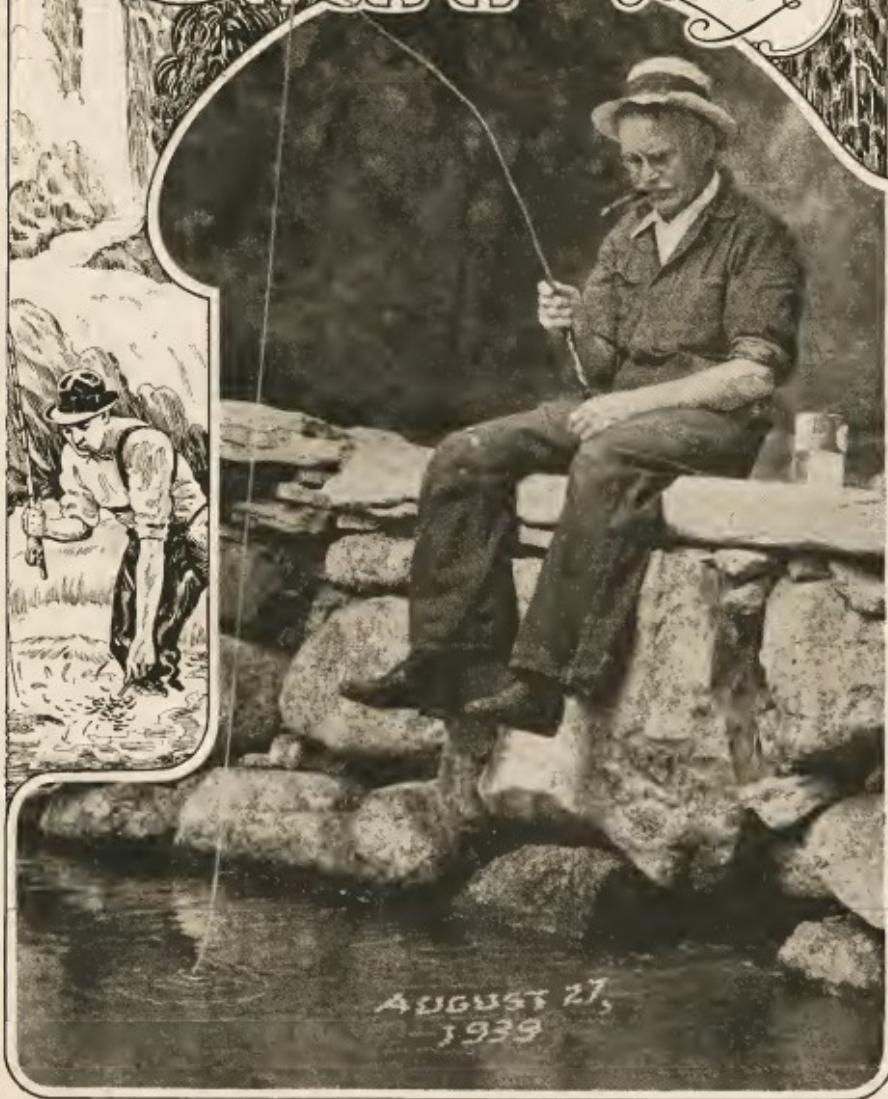


GRIFT

Story
Section



TOURISTS ACCOMMODATED, A Story That Will Touch Your Heart-TODAY

TOURISTS ACCOMMODATED

BY AGNES SLIGH TURNBULL

THIS farm house of David Forey and his wife Maggie stood in a grove of locust trees about a quarter of a mile back from the main highway. In spite of the fact that locust were some of the most delicious eating, David had steadily refused to eat one of them down. This meant that from no window of the house could one glimpse the shining black sam strip of the road. Along the road the locusts thrived in the shade and cast of night.

Sometimes, lying wakeful in bed, Maggie could hear above the tree tops and crickets the low pulsing hum of the motors. Her heart always beat faster as she lay there, and the heat would burn heavily again in her breast. For day and night the world of traveling folk kept passing by down there just at the foot of the lane, never noticing her call to them.

And yet, so strong a thing is hope, each afternoon as the sun began to show red above the barn, she found herself putting on a clean apron, making the kitchen still more immaculate and inventing various little excuses for running out to look down the lane.

When she had first mentioned the matter far and wide, David had given her a great sort of decision, as though he had been married. "I'll take you," he said. "I'll make you a kitchen, I'll make you a washstand set, I'll get my best sheets and quilts in there."

"You know the spare room is nice just now, I mean up where we was married. It's a good feather bed, an' the washstand set is pretty. I got my best sheets and quilts in there."

He bent over his work and then he said sharply, "What's that?"

"It's all the kind of places that's takin' tourists now. Stylish places. Bath-houses, garages, everything! Anybody fool enough to start up our lane would turn tail" he go back soon as he heard her voice again.

"No, stop talkin' about tourists," she cried. "I have no nonsense about tourists, d'you hear?"

Maggie heard, but she did not forget the idea that had suddenly possessed her. She thought it in again and again.

"Listen, David. We could just put up a sign on the foot of the lane. It wouldn't cost anything."

"An' suppose somebody did come. What'll you do with them here?"

"Why, we got plenty of food, David. That's what we live on. There's always ham and eggs and all my preserves. I got my own butter' mill. Big bacon of bread. You wouldn't be a cent out—not that she's ever missed on anything."

"An' suppose somebody did come. What'll you do with them here?"

"That's what we live on. There's always ham and eggs and all my preserves. I got my own butter' mill. Big bacon of bread. You wouldn't be a cent out—not that she's ever missed on anything."

David laughed roughly. He was a big man with an uncouth way about him. When he had courted Maggie in their youth he had been clumsy and awkward enough it is true, but there had been another lighter side under his shaggy brows, and his voice had been kind. She always called him David.

Then that was long ago. For years his voice had been harsh, and his eyes expressionless except when something interested Maggie. She pondered often on the change and why it had come. Her starved heart had made a new home for him. This had gone so well for them. There had been many a disappointment. Life had shown a little harder and emptier every year. But now—

She continued eagerly.

"An' you know the spare room is nice just now, I mean up where we was married. It's a good feather bed, an' the washstand set is pretty. I got my best sheets and quilts in there."

"You Take Tourists Here?" the Man Asked

canned blackberry pie, Maggie broached the subject again.

"Mind I'm not sayin' anybody'd ever stop, but if . . . if you'd just fix a place up, I'd be so happy. Honest, David, I can't tell you how pleased I'd be just to try."

David didn't bang the table this time. He only withdrew his pipe and looked at her.

"All the women I ever seen, you're the beatinest! Now here's what I'm sayin'. What you do, do you do on your own mind you. I'm havin' no part in the whole business. I'm not even paid."

"Ain't it all 'most murder whether you put up a sign or not for all the tourists that'll ever come up our lane?"

"Tain't as if we was layin' out any money, David. If nobody ever stops we'll be makin' the poorer. There's no set, but don't look to me!"

With this much grant, Maggie had gone to sleep. But she grieved over his obstinacy. In spite of the apparent clumsiness of his big hands David had been a good man. He had been the hunting signs for all the farmers in the neighborhood, and often a man they hardly knew would stop with a request for a Beware of the Dog or a No Trespassing board to be painted.

But one evening in April after a good supper of ham and fried potatoes and

A LITTLE OLD LADY WITH A HEART OF GOLD... AND HER FIRST BUSINESS VENTURE



"You Take Tourists Here?" the Man Asked

she stopped to turn up the lane.

In the evening David would watch her and then laugh tauntingly.

"The tourist business we're doing these days is just what we can live well this winter on the way money we're makin' on our lodgers."

Maggie would try to smile back at him though her thin cheeks flushed uncomfortably. "Savine ain't over yet," she would say. "They laugh best at us."

But when June came and passed, Maggie's heart fell with a great and bitter disappointment.

"This was her prime time. Somehow she had never doubted but that cars would drive up the lane in June and stop in the barnyard. She would run out and help the ladies in, through the front yard past the cabbage roses and the potato patch, where they wouldn't help but like the flowers, even if the house itself was shabby looking and the furniture not very fine."

But the precious weeks went by. The pots dried and fell, the mock orange faded its fragrance and was gone and the rose petals lay on the ground by the fence.

By the end of August Maggie had virtually given up hope, so when a man in a suit and hat drove up the lane late afternoon, she didn't see it come. She had been out at the barn gathering the eggs, a task which a busy morning had postponed. As she came across the barnyard, a small basket on her arm and her apron filled, she saw a dusty

coupe standing near the back fence. She stopped dead in her tracks, her heart thumping.

But it was As she came up to the spot breathlessly a man got out of the car and walked to meet her. He was a tired-looking middle-aged man who seemed rather startling younger when he smiled.

"You take tourists here," he inquired of her, raising his hat.

"Yes," Maggie answered, her voice trembling in her throat. "Just! Just you get in, out an' I'll take care of my, you, you caught me in such trim today. I somehow didn't keep a look-out. . . .

"You can't turn back to the car and talked in a low voice to the woman there. Maggie stood rooted to the spot, a cold despair overtaking her.

"There's all kinds of people, just like them all round the country. One person might try stoppin' an' it a'nt tell another. I'll charge much, I'll make them comfortable. My, I'll treat them as nice as I know how!"

"But you can't tell," she told herself. "There's all kinds of people, just like them all round the country. One person might try stoppin' an' it a'nt tell another. I'll charge much, I'll make them comfortable. My, I'll treat them as nice as I know how!"

But April passed, and May. The locusts bloomed and sent their alluring perfume out upon the air. Waves of it, Maggie thought eagerly, must surely strike the cars as they passed. But it nobody stopped to turn up the lane.

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But the precious weeks went by. The pots dried and fell, the mock orange faded its fragrance and was gone and the rose petals lay on the ground by the fence.

"How do you do?" she said in a sweet, throaty voice. "Mr. S. Bannister and this is my husband."

"How do you do? I'm sure I know you're tired . . ." For the woman was a strange tension upon it. It was a press-free face, not just young, Maggie's instinct told her, but yet youthful looking. Her hair was a rich golden, and her cheeks were very pink. She had a rather wide mouth that curved now with friendliness.

"Now you just wait a minute I'll put these eggs down I'll take you in the front way. Ms. I know you're tired . . ."

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Continued on Page II



Swift Water

by EMILIE LORING

THE STORY THUS FAR

JEAN RANDOLPH returns to the small town of Garston at the request of her father, wealthy Hugh Randolph, from whom she has been separated ten years, ever since the day her mother left with her for the city to make a name for herself as an author.

As she is speeding through the main street of Garston in her snappy roadster the girl is stopped by a traffic officer attired in the uniform of a World War officer. She is provoked when he proves impervious to her charms and insists that she appear in court the next day to answer a charge of reckless driving.

At her home Jean is greeted by her handsome father and her maternal grandmother, Contessa Vittoria di Fanfani, who lives in the past of a glorious opera triumph. The old woman and Zambrano, her one-time impresario, believe they have uncovered a prospective opera star. To the girl's amazement he proves to be the pinch-hitting traffic officer whom she encountered earlier in the day.

Further to Miss Randolph's surprise, the singer is the Rev.

CHAPTER VII

 **U**NDAY bush. Jean sensed it as her yellow and black roadster shot between the gate posts of Hill Top. Curious how the world stalled on the Seventh Day. She looked back. It seemed as though the myriad eyes of the spreading white house regarded her with stark disapproval. Defiantly she glanced at the golf bag, tennis rackets, conspicuously displayed on the seat beside her. She glimpsed her white sports frock with its yellow jacket in the windshield mirror. Nothing wrong about that.

Jean reduced the speed of her car as she entered the main street. A challenge to the World and his Wife. If anyone inquired her destination she was prepared to answer gaily:

"To the country club of course. Why not? Imagine sitting in a stuffy church this glorious morning."

She nodded and smiled radiantly at acquaintances. Every girl in town was bent decorously churchward. Hypocrites! How long would they desert the club for the church were Christopher Wynne to be given his conge? The month was creeping on. Had he decided to give in, to work for the money? She had heard fragments of dispute between her father and the contessa. He hotly resented the dissension she had started. His mother-in-law was exultant. The congregation of the Community Church was splitting into factions, some members were bolting the ticket, as it were.

Was it the fashion to walk to morning service in Garston? Everyone was doing it. She passed Sue Calvin and her father. He frowned disapprovingly, set his thin lips, lifted his silk hat grudgingly, his daughter gave her an oblique, calculating stare. Fanchon Farrell, a green and gold vision, hurried by pulling on her gloves. She sighed theatrically, called:

"Another gown!" Giggled. Cast a possessive glance at the roadster, added:

Christopher Wynne, pastor of the Community Church of Garston. It develops he acted as traffic officer to help out a friend whose wife was ill. He visits the Randolph home in company with his twin sister, Constance, in whom Hugh Randolph seems interested and who has discouraged the suit of Luther Calvin, a dominant figure in the Rev. Mr. Wynne's church.

The minister will not listen to Madame la Contessa's pleas that he train for an operatic career so she offers a large sum for a social center for the church on the condition that the church match the sum within a given time. Shrewd woman that she is, she knows the pastor will not participate in a money-raising campaign and she hopes he'll be forced to resign his pastorate. Then, she believes, he'll become a professional singer.

The strong-willed pastor does refuse to co-operate in the campaign and Calvin's clique demands his resignation. At about the same time, he hears Jean say she's not interested in him as a prospective lover for she wants an "advance model" suitor. And she continues to shun his church.

Christopher Wynne in his black gown—perhaps he didn't wear one—perhaps—

"Snap out of it, Jean!" Brooke protested as they returned to the club house. "Your game's slipping. You've been as responsive going round as a wax mannikin. What's on the little mind?"

"Nothing, Harvey."

"Truthful Jean. She realizes her mental limitations." He tucked his arm in hers, cajoled, "Bout fed up on this town? Chuck it. Marry me and we'll do anything, go anywhere you say."

"I can't, Harvey."

"I've found an emerald for you, Sweetness—I'll produce it the minute you say the word—that will knock the spots out of that gorgeous one your mother wears on her little finger."

Harvey couldn't know, of course, that that ring was hateful to her because she had loathed the story which had brought the check which had bought the ring. She shook her head.

"You can't bribe me with an emerald. I promised my father I would stay through the winter."

"A sacrifice! Yes, a sacrifice on the altar of filial affection," Brooke mocked gaily. "Well, if you won't fly with me—I mean that literally—I've ordered a new plane, a seaplane, thought I'd experiment on the river, I'll try anything once. This town is up to date in one respect, the flying field is a corker, with its big river frontage, its beacon. Let's eat. I've reserved a table. There's always a big crowd here Sunday."

"I'm surprised. I thought they were all at church."

Harvey regarded her solicitously.

"Meow. This town is getting you. I never heard you sound caty before."

"I'm sorry, but they do go to church, don't they?"

"They sure do, in hordes. May drop in myself some day, just to find out what Wynne talks about. I'll give him credit for being human. Gave him a lift one Sunday afternoon when I was coming home from the links, car full of golf clubs. Sort of apologized for playing.

STORY SECTION

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Story Section No. 333

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The short stories and serial novels printed herein are fiction and intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or events. The name of any person living person is used. It is a coincidence.

He laughed. Said, "Why not? The Sabbath was made for man. I contend that the person who attends morning service is entitled to do anything he likes in the afternoon. He won't go far wrong." Kind of wished I'd been at church."

Jean stopped suddenly.

"I won't stay for lunch. I'm going home."

"Home? What for?"

"I'll have luncheon with father and the countess, they lunch together on Sundays, they call it breakfast and keep open house. Come if you want to."

"Sure, I'll come. Do you think I'm in that dead town for any reason but to be with you? I'll join you at Hill Top after I've had my shower."

Why had she grafted Harvey Brooke on to her day, Jean demanded of herself impatiently as she entered a woody road. She wouldn't go through the town again. The river looked dreamily peaceful. Made her think of a lioness asleep. She had seen it rage and roar during a spring break-up. That narrow path up the hill had worn bare since the days when she had her playhouse half way up, or, half way down, if one approached from Hill Top. Was the log cabin still usable? She would investigate. Harvey and luncheon might wait.

She parked her car among some bushes. Swiftly ascended the trail. Somber shadows stalked under the pine trees, checkers of sunlight quivered in the open spaces. She stopped once. Curious feeling she had of not being alone. Had a dim shape slipped from tree to tree? Silly. Imagination. She couldn't call it nerves. She had none.

In the clearing before the cabin she mounted a huge boulder—a meteorite cast off by some flaming star millions of years ago, doubtless. Above her, mysterious, limpid blue. Below, fields, the isle-dotted river, gray in spots with floating logs, cliff-like banks surrounded by cottages—almost she could look down the chimney of one—the distant town, the bell-tower, silent now, no longer singing. Walls marking off fields. Even as a child those laboriously piled stones had spurred her imagination. What hidden life went on between the boulders and cobbles, gray, moss-patched, rust-streaked, mica-bright which formed the stone walls of New England?

To the north loomed the dark bulk of the Plant, the white dots which were the houses of the workmen. Infinite space. It rested here.

Humming lightly she approached the log cabin. It had been kept in excellent repair. She tried the door. Padlocked. Eyes shaded by her hands she peered through the bars which protected the windows. Someone was using it. It had chairs, a table with an old-fashioned blue and red checker cloth, logs ready for lighting in the fireplace, five old-fashioned lamps on the mantel, polished, shining, filled to the brim with clear oil. In gold letters on each crystal bowl was a word. She pressed her face against the bars. Could she make them out? Yes. Honor. Cour-

age. Gratitude. Faith. Reliability. The lamps must belong to the W. Vs. Had her father loaned the cabin to them? Across one end of the long room was her boat. In it were the very cushions she had used when with a governess she had rowed on the river. Her father had stored it here all these years! He did care for her.

A sound behind her! Someone else on the hill? She turned. Her heart did a cart-wheel and righted. Between the boulder and the log cabin stood a man staring at her with green eyes from beneath the brim of a rakish hat. One of the men whom Christopher Wynne had had haled to court. She remembered his moth-eaten mustache, which

him alone. He had me pinched for a little bit of law-breaking, it's kinder put a clamp in my business." His eyes narrowed, opened wide again quickly, as he added—"Thought he might advise me—how—to be honest an' get a livin' now—now that machines have taken my job."

He was lying, Jean told herself, trying to deceive her as to his real motive in seeking Christopher Wynne. Too much humility in his voice, too much sparkle in his eyes, too much mockery in his smile. What was his real motive? Revenge? Why should he think the clergyman came to this hill? She suggested:

"You would better go to his study. This is my cabin and—and as

Mr. Wynne and I are not friends, he is not likely to come here."

"I remember. You're the girl he had up for speedin' the same day he grabbed my car, Say——"

He stopped to listen to the sound of running steps up the trail, voices young, high-pitched, the jangle of keys. With cat-like agility he slipped behind a tree, stole to another, then another, vanished like a wraith as Sally-May Wynne and fat Floe Calvin puffing like a porpoise, dashed into the clearing. They squealed satisfaction as they saw the girl reproached in unison:

"Why didn't you go to church?"

Jean stiffened with indignation. She would put these children in their places for keeps,

she asked in a voice spiced with ridicule.

"Does the Rev. Mr. Christopher send you out after strayed sheep?"

After one horror-stricken second Sally-May got into her stride.

"Send us after you! Gee whiz! Can't we come to our own club room for a conference? Let he cares about you since I told him you said that you baited a man who under the guise of church catered to a lot of silly, sentimental women."

Jean could have cried—had she been the crying sort—from humiliation and fury. She caught Sally-May by the shoulder, shook her lightly as she demanded:

"How dared you tell him that? Who said I said it?"

Fat Floe drew a thread of gum from her mouth, retrieved it before she drawled:



The Two Little Girls Stood Aside for Jean to Enter

didn't quite conceal the mockery of his twisted mouth. She gave back his glance steadily as she demanded:

"What do you want?"

He thrust his hand into a pocket, as he responded:

"You needn't be afraid, Miss. I'm lookin' for the person. He uses this cabin to work in, don't he? Every time I've come there's be'n a skirt a-satin' an' waitin'. I want to consult him about—about my salvation I guess he'd call it."

His tone and eyes mocked. What did this man really want or Christopher Wynne? Jean tried to keep her voice indifferent as she inquired:

"Why don't you go to his study at the church?"

He showed his white teeth—beautifully white—in a satiric grin.

"Now's that an idea, too! But, likely there'd be interruptions. I want to see

"Fanchon Farrell and—"

"I guess you didn't know that Flo and I are W. Vs., did you? That's our headquarters." Sally-May nodded toward the log house. She looked at Flora fixedly before she explained more generally:

"Your father lets us use it. He won't allow us to take the boat out, said that he was keeping it till his own little girl came back. Did he mean you? Perhaps you'd like to see how we've fixed up the cabin?"

Thoroughly ashamed of the shake she had administered—after all these were children—Jean smiled her appreciation.

"I would. It was my play house for years before I was as old as you are."

She watched as Sally-May inserted a key in the padlock and threw open the door. The two girls stood aside for her to enter. She forgot them as she crossed the threshold. There was the benth with crooked legs she had made, she felt again the pain of her pounded thumb, pounded five times for every nail she had hit fair and square.

A bunk was built on one side of the cabin. On the wall was a shelf of books. She smiled as she recognized an old, tried and true friend, "The Swiss Family Robinson." She must have thrilled over it a hundred times. The sight of the boat contracted her throat. If only she had realized before the depth of feeling beneath her father's reserve. She had had a happy childhood, if a lonely one. Always there had been the Terrible Twin for company. Had Sally-May a twin? Sally-May! How quiet she was. She turned. Four hands gave her a vigorous push into the room. The door shut with a bang. The padlock clicked. She ran to the window. Pounded on the glass. Called:

"Let me out!"

Sally-May's pointed face with its spectacled eyes looking preternaturally wise and owlish, peered in upon her. Beside her, slashed with a grim which would have caused the Cheshire Cat to hang its head in shame, snuggled fat Flora's. "Promise to go to church every Sunday?" the two chorused.

Jean saw red with fury. So that was it. Those fiendish children were attempting coercion. She regarded them levelly. Spoke close to her own side of the glass.

"I'll not promise to go to church if you keep me here forever." She struggled with a window. Sally-May grinned maliciously.

"Pull yourself together! You can't get out even if you open it. Hoboes came up here and broke the glass so they could get in to sleep. Mr. Randolph barred the windows so they couldn't. Promise an' we'll let you out."

"Promise an' we'll let you out," echoed Flora, her curiously speckled brown eyes impish with triumph.

In answer Jean drew a chair toward the fireplace, searched on the lamp-laden stone mantel for matches. From the corner of her eye she saw the two heads close together in consultation, saw two heads nod, saw two figures steal away.

She ran to the window. The girls were disappearing into the upward trail. Should she call and parley with them? Tell them that she would consider going to church? Not if she remained a prisoner forever!

She forged in a cupboard, found a tin box of matches. Struck one and tossed it on the kindling. A tiny flare. A flame. A crackle as the wood took fire. What should she do now? She glanced at her wristwatch. One o'clock. She realized that she was hungry. Ravenously hungry. Her father and the contessa would be at luncheon soon. Would they miss her? Ridiculous situation! Locked in by those abominable children! She returned to the cupboard. Did the W. Vs. keep provisions here? Yes, there was a tin of crackers, ancient but edible. She wasn't ravenous enough to eat those—yet. A

tessly she drew down the window. Suppose he were still lurking about? He would see the smoke of her fire. Gently she parted the burning logs, watched the young flames die out. That was that.

Locked in and night coming on. Curious that no one had missed her. Those detestable girls! Had they forgotten her or didn't they dare tell what they had done? Unless she wanted to spend the night in the cabin she must shout for help. She hated to have anyone know that she had been tricked. The story would spread like fire on run-away oil. Fanchon would gurgle—Sue Calvin would look superior—she detested them all! As for that abominable Sally-May—

Words were too feeble to express her fury. She ran to the window, shoved it up with a force which rattled the



"I Can't Imagine a More Unsatisfactory Way to Kiss," Said a Cool Voice Behind Brooke

bit of cheese so hard that no self-respecting mouse would attempt a nibble. A jar of jam. Moldy on top but still jam. She could go without food for some time before she touched that. Quite suddenly she became thirsty. She couldn't stay in the place. She wouldn't. She pushed up one of the windows. Shook the bars. They had been screwed on to withstand wrenching. She could call, but who would hear her? Except for the household at Hill Top the residents of Garrison dined at half after one on Sundays. No one would hear unless—the face of the man who had been waiting for Christopher Wynne flashed upon the screen of her mind, the mockery of his twisted mouth, the insolence of his green eyes. Not so good. Sound-

glass. She pressed her face against the cool iron bars. Opened her mouth to shout. Closed it with a snap which sent her teeth sharply into her lip as a face almost touched hers; a face with green eyes, a moth-eaten mustache above a twisted mouth. She dragged her voice up from the depths to demand imperiously:

"What are you doing here?"

The man chuckled malevolently; set

Continued on Page II

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COLD CALCULATION

BY STANLEY CORDELL

A MOVIE ACTOR EXPLAINS HOW HE STAYED ON TOP



FYOU get anywhere as an actor in Hollywood you have to have an over-abundance of ability, a reputation, or contacts. With Hadley Perkins it was contacts. Curious, too, because the man who gave him the most help and really put him on top was Chet Ames.

Now, most every one knows Chet Ames. Chet has been in pictures a long time. Once or twice he's almost reached the top. But never quite.

You'd think that Chet would resent a rising young actor like Hadley Perkins. Not so. Hadley had fought his way from the ranks of extras to doing bit parts. Chet gave him a helping hand. And that was at a time when Kaufman Studios, because of an avalanche of fan mail and newspaper talk, considered giving Chet a lead role in his next vehicle.

To make a long story short, it was Hadley Perkins who robbed Chet of his chance. Through Chet's efforts, Hadley began rapidly to attract attention. He went ahead in leaps and bounds, and when the final casting for the new picture came along, Hadley was assigned the star part that would have gone to Chet.

Hadley felt pretty bad about it. He owed his success to Chet and he knew it. He hated the thought of elbowing his benefactor to one side on his climb to fame. But what could he do to ease the situation? There is little room for a man with scruples and honor on the ladder to fame.

So Hadley merely felt bad and let it go at that. For awhile he avoided Chet, felt a twinge of conscience whenever they met. But this feeling wore off. Chet didn't act bitter or resentful or sore, and besides, things were happening too fast for Hadley to waste much time grieving.

Within a year from the time Chet first introduced him to the right people, Hadley was on top. Unequalled and unchallenged in the role of most popular movie actor in Hollywood.

That was the year I first began to know Chet intimately. I had to do some publicity for him, and we became pretty good friends. He was likable, surprisingly reserved for a featured player whose name was known to millions of Americans. It was only after we had established ourselves on an intimate basis that he let down at all. By letting down I mean he betrayed the real man lurking behind the Hollywood front.

It was acquaintanceship with this real man that aroused my curiosity, set me to thinking and later to investigating. Chet Ames was shrewd. He had a



"A Man's a Fool to Become a Star,"
Chet Said

mind that was cold and calculating and sharp. He had a head for figures and an insight into human nature that was astounding.

This discovery didn't cause me to like him any less, but he made me wonder why he had let Hadley elbow him out of the limelight. It made me think back, and thinking back I recalled other actors who had forced Chet into the background and advanced themselves out front.

Something was wrong. This business of allowing himself to be relegated to the ranks by men less shrewd than himself wasn't consistent with the Chet Ames that I had come to know.

So I questioned him about it. At first

he only laughed and changed the subject. When I persisted, he sobered and looked at me keenly.

"Bothers you, doesn't it?" he asked quietly.

"I'd like to know the answer to the riddle," I admitted.

He lit a cigarette. "I like you, Ray. Hate to have you go on thinking me a dub. Keep what I have to say under your hat!"

"Why, sure. You know that."

"OK. How long do you think I've been in pictures?"

I figured. "About 11 years."

"Sixteen. I started when I was 17. I'm 33 now. Even since I've been 23 I've been a featured player at a nice salary."

"You could have hit the top at a nicer salary, if you hadn't let birds like Hadley Perkins steal the show."

Chet blew smoke through his nose. "Where's Perkins now?"

I thought. This was two years after Chet had given Hadley his boost. I shook my head. "I don't know. Made his pile and quit, I guess."

"No." Chet shook his head. "Just quit. Listen, Ray, the average popularity span of great stars is six years. Some of 'em go longer, others less. If a man's a type he lasts less because folks get sick of types. Hadley was a type. So am I. I didn't want to risk being kicked out. I like acting too much. I like the salary I get. The Good Old Public is the hardest taskmaster in the world. If you depend upon them to build you up, you can also depend upon them betraying you in the end."

I began to see a light. "So you figured if you never allowed yourself to become too important, the hero of the masses, not so much would be expected of you. You wouldn't be big enough to have folks go to the trouble of condemning you."

"That's about it."

"And whenever you looked as though you were going to be pushed out in front you sponsored some one like Perkins, groomed him to take your place. A sort of passing the buck idea, at the same time making a hero of yourself."

He looked at me quizzically. "Not that. I thought it all out. If a man hasn't sense enough to know he's a fool for becoming a star, that's his hard luck. Most men are too vain to ignore the bid for fame. I had to fight to overcome the desire. Now I'm glad. Most of the stars have faded. They wonder why. That's pictures for you. I've been in movies for 16 years and I'm still going strong. That's being smart."

I had to agree.

THE SECRETS OF LIFE

WE WOULD miss the steely vapor,
If the skies were ever blue;
We would miss the pearly sparkles,
If there never were a dew;
We would long for shade and darkness,
Were the hours like brightest day;
We would sigh for hills and valleys,
Were our path a level way.

Thus it is on life's brief journey—
There must be both night and day;
There must come the rain and sunshine,
Our rough, uneven way;
There must be some days of sorrow,
When the heart is crushed with grief,
When the tears will flow in silence,
And their falling brings relief.

We must learn life's secret lesson—
Blending bitter with the sweet,
Sending sunshine with the raindrops,
Bringing to us cold and heat.
We must learn the art of blending;
We must needs pass through the deep,
Ever pressing onward, forward,
Till we climb the mountain's steep.

—N. P. NELSEN.

Guns of the Round Stone Valley

CONTINUING A FAST-MOVING WESTERN ROMANCE BY VINGIE E. ROE

THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS

LIKE the searing breath of a prairie fire across the plains of Round Stone Valley, swept the power, the unbridled will and terror that was "Heller" Sands. From "outside" he had come years before—marrying a woman ten years his senior, with the idea of getting control of the Stop Gap place—claiming for his herds whatever grazing lands his eyes touched. Defiance by other cattlemen brought death—swift and ambushed. A veritable reign of terror held Round Stone Valley!

Two beings along dared oppose "Heller" Sands—Thanna Wright, his beautiful step-daughter, and Streaker, his mighty blue roan stallion. Here alone did he meet his match. Yet obviously the odds were against them, for the one he loved and was determined to possess, and the other he swore one day to kill.

Then one day there came to the valley little, soft-spoken young Brand Kensett from Texas—Kensett with a mission, and the determination born of blighting arrow, to fulfill that mission. For some time he was not sure that "Heller" Sands was the man

he sought and for some time, too, the "Heller" wasn't certain he was being sought.

The cowardly slayings of Dick Hadley and Jim Stoner, Sands' accomplices in covering up. The burning of Jerrod Selby's haystack could not be proven against him and the poisoning of Selby's cattle was a mystery until Sheriff Smith, assisted by Kensett and Travis, wrung from Dr. Allen the admission that Sands had intimidated him so that the poisoned water was not analyzed.

All this while Thanna is virtually a prisoner at the Stop Gap Ranch, held there by the fear that her step-father will kill her mother. So, too, is Jack Jessup, a cowboy who knows too much for his own good. Brand Kensett fears for the safety of Thanna, whom he has come to love.

After learning from Dr. Allen of the "Heller's" methods of covering up the cattle poisoning, Sheriff Smith, Kensett, Travis, and a few others start for Stop Gap Ranch to lodge charges against its lawless boss. En route they are fired upon from ambush and the sheriff and Travis are wounded.

"Fair-and-open," he said. "Some day I'll make him draw—and I hope I beat him to it."

"If you don't it's all up with Round Stone Valley and everybody in it. Every man, woman, and child will move away—and Sands will be the cattle king he's bragged about."

"I know. Sheriff Smith and the law he stands for will get him in the end—but that may be too far away. Besides," said Kensett, his somber eyes on the hot slowly turning in his dark fingers. "I want my chance."

He fell silent, thinking down the past.

"I want my chance," he said again. He had forgotten Travis.

So destiny marked time in the Round Stone, while Sheriff Smith lay in the great darkness where an unknown assassin had cast him, Travis smocked in his hospital bed and waited, Kensett went about the work in the Unsurveilled and Jerrod Selby was sunk in apathy.

"It's no use, boys," he said, "after what's happened. We're just waiting to be picked off one by one. I'm about ready to give up and go."

"Not me!" said young Pete furiously. "Let them kill and be hanged! I'll never leave the South Bend except in my coffin!"

"No, and you won't either, Jerrod, sir," said Kensett, "don't think about such things."

And Heller Sands took to driving all up and down the floor of Round Stone, his hawk's eyes staring covetously over the wide ranges of the A Bar A and the rolling slopes of South Bend. The week after the mysterious shooting of Sheriff Smith, one of the small outfits under the Rockface moved out, bag and baggage, driving their slim herd, their gear loaded on a truck and two wagons. Sixteen hundred acres lay abandoned there.

Ben Sands grinned when he heard about it from Sam Brinlee.

"Left in th' night," the latter said, "wenz by here two-three in th' mornin'. Dogs set up a racket, an' th' stock bawlin'—waked me up."

"Ain't healthy for some folks," the

CHAPTER XVII

KENSETT got out and, easing g-Smith over into his own seat, climbed in under the wheel. "Hold Travis," he said, "we're driving—hard."

And he headed at the highest speed he dared attempt for the county seat more than 60 miles away.

With the serious shooting of Sheriff Smith, the wounding of young Travis, terrorism clamped down like an invisible but relentless hand on all the country of the Round Stone. Men who had been stirring at the call of Selby and Kensett, now sank back upon themselves in noncommittal silence.

Even Shadford, never decidedly aggressive but acquiescent, began to hedge. Kensett, driving daily about Travis' affairs, tending his stock, watching his springs for failing waters or dead cattle, making a trap every fourth day down to the town to see how things were going at the hospital, had his hands full. Also his heart was full. Anxiety for Thanna ate him, and a cold and deadly rage was growing in him, a far worse thing than that old sorrow which had sent him hunting—a man he'd heard about. This new burden laid upon that other made him old beyond his years, a quiet man who spoke so little now that others let him be, respecting something of the spirit in him which precluded speech.

He did not go to Stop Gap as he had promised Thanna that he would, for he felt the time was not yet ripe. Some day in the not far distant future he would do so, and then he would be ready to take her with him and Esther too, by force if necessary, for a deluded woman's sick desires were not worth a young girl's all.

Sheriff Smith was very low. He had evidently turned a bit at the exact moment of the shot, so that the bullet had entered his breast a little to the left and high. Two inches lower and it would have found his intrepid heart. Dr. Allen, stricken and silent about his part

in the whole affair since Smith was unconscious and could not direct him, hung over the sick man day and night. The little plump man lost his roundness, his eyes were set in wide dark rings. Kensett, his lips tight, came and went and said nothing to any one. Travis was doing nicely, his grazed temple bandaged, his right arm in a sling, a cast along his shoulder where a bone had been shattered. He, too, spoke only to Kensett and then guardedly, "Know anything? Hear anything?" he asked him.

"Not a word. That attempt at wholesale slaughter has had just the effect its perpetrators meant it to. The only slip was that we all escaped with our lives. I fully believe that all four of us were slated to be killed at once. And it was a good shot who held that rifle, if you ask me. All five shots were hits."

"Ben Sands is a cracksmen, so they say," said Travis quietly.

"Well," said Kensett as quietly, "I'm only waiting for you and Sheriff Smith to get on your feet. I, too, can shoot." "I make no doubt," said Travis, and added meaningfully, "Why wait for us? If one man can shoot from ambush so can another—and we know who we want."

But Kensett shook his head.

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Heller said, grinning, leaning against the counter, "around here."

It was a small happening, its worth scarcely counted in the scheme of his reckonings, but it was a straw in the wind of the great hegira he witnessed in the future. Shadows, that's what. And men going out from under to find sunshine in distant places.

And nothing on him or his.

No one could point a finger at Ben Sands in connection with this outfit. He had never done a thing to it. Just—shadows.

But shadows are sinister things, more frightening than reality sometimes. And Heller Sands was a past master at making shadows on the wall of fate.

"Ben," said Lily anxiously, breaking in on his exciting thoughts, "I haven't

and hard from daily work, and he was sullen with despair and jealous hatred. His head snapped back until his neck seemed to crack and he staggered backward, half running, half falling. His right hand, sweeping along the counter, struck the heavy scales and gave him purchase, so that he righted himself with an effort.

Blind mad he came for Sands like a young bull, head lowered, and sailed into him, fighting. Sands struck him methodically, hammer-blow after hammer-blow, taking a punch now and then himself, and the matter developed into a real man fight. They surged away from the counter into the open floor space and everything in their way flew before them—boxes, crates, barrels.

The combatants fell and rose and

battle was over, for the boy went down and lay still with his rough brown head behind a box, and the Heller stood looking down at him with his gray eyes flaring. He set the handle back and dusted his hands elaborately, glanced at Sam and Lily.

"Fair fight," he said with meaning, "if any one should ask you."

Then he left the store and Lily sat back stupidly against the shelves behind the counter, her hand across her mouth, the pit of her stomach drawn in. Not the danger to Ben Sands—not the viciousness of his attack—not the underworld method of his victory—was in her mind.

It was Johnny Burk's words that held her spellbound, her blue eyes wide with terror.

"Too busy keeping Thanna away from Brand Kensem—only one who don't know he's crazy about—"

"No!" she cried out suddenly, "it isn't true! It's not!"

"Girl," said her father sternly, "shut up and come here and help me. We've got to get him out of sight. Hurry."

With difficulty they dragged the inert body of the rider into the living room behind the store and laid him out on the floor. Trembling, Lily brought cold water and bathed his face and hands. It was a full and fear-filled hour before he came round and opened his eyes. By early dark he was able to climb on his horse and go back to the ranch, and he had no glimpse of Lily after the first few moments. She had deliberately absented herself and let her father bring him back to normal.

She did not want to bear anything further that Johnny Burk might say.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVERYTHING that Ben Sands touched became tinged, sooner or later, with one dark color—fear. Round Stone and its inhabitants had long been shadowed with it. It was due now to lay its hand on little Lily Brinlee, who, in her innocence, had dared to play with the arch monster who inspired it. In the dark of the early night following the fight between the two men in the store, she sat upright in her fringed hammock, her small hands locked together in her lap, and for the first time looked it in the face.

Strive as she would she could not discredit the words of Johnny Burk as she had discredited, blindly and with steadfast faith, every other evil thing she had heard about the Heller. There was, somehow, a deadly ring of truth about them. The fury in Sands' face as he had leaped and struck corroborated it. Thanna Wright, his step-daughter, living in his house, being with him every day—Why had she never thought of this other girl, so small and handsome? Why had she only envisioned Esther, the aging wife, as a potential danger? Lily twisted her fingers, thought until her head ached, her heart like a lump of lead beneath her small breast.

She did not rock the hammock but sat

*"It Might Be Another Matter
If I Shot You—Dead!"
Thanna Warned Sands*

seen you—not to rightly talk—for so long. Why don't you come down oftener?"

Sands jerked about irritably.

"For pete's sake, Lily," he said, "what's got into you? Always nagging a man! I can't be running down here every whip-stitch. I've got work to do."

At the look of fright which overspread the pretty face under the golden hairs recovered his grin.

"Shoo, kid," he said, reaching to pat her shoulder, "forget it. Guess I'm just a little touchy with all the stuff some folks are trying to pin on me around here."

Johnny Burk, fiddling with a silver dollar on the counter further down, waiting for Brinlee to tie up some packages for him, flared round.

"He don't come down, Lily," he said somberly, "because he's too busy keeping Thanna away from Brand Kensem. You're about the only one in the valley who don't know he's crazy about—"

Sands, for all his vast bulk, could move like a striking snake.

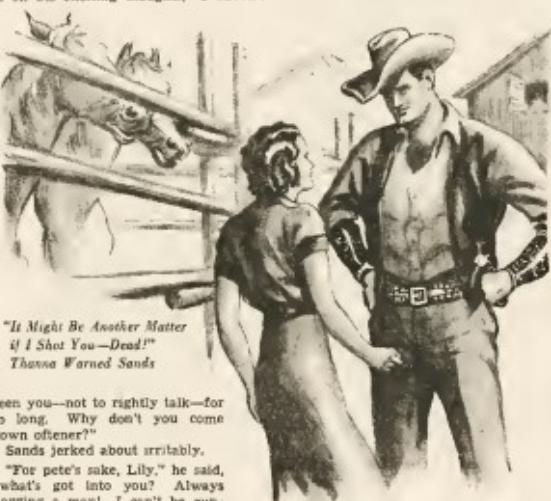
He moved now and his big fist smashed into the boy's face as it had smashed in Jessup's. But Johnny Burk was no weakling like Jessup.

He was a husky young chap, thick-set

rushed against each other with wild fury.

The Heller's face was red, but Johnny's was white as milk. Instinctively he knew that he had started something which would not end here, no matter who won out this day. It was the first time any one had dared to voice in Ben Sands' presence what every one was saying now about himself and Thanna, and Heller Sands would not take that lying down. So he sought to finish Johnny with the bull strength of him, the flinting quality of his attack.

He beat him down from his great height, struck upward under the boy's chin and knocked him drunkenly from side to side. But he had tough fiber here, and something not of the body but the soul, and strive as he might he could not finish Johnny Burk. And so, true to the reasoning of his life, he glanced about for aid and found it in a keg of hardwood handles for picks and axes. Driving the fight that way he grabbed one for a club and the next moment the



still and stiff, a tragic young figure, staring down the black vistas of a suddenly fearful future.

Her breath came in long, labored inhalations, as if there were not enough air in all the universe to ease her aching lungs, and her blue eyes were wide and tearless. She did not cry now, for this time, this vague certainty of disaster, went too deep.

All through the long hours she sat so, shivering with the chill of the later night, and toward morning she fell over in the hammock, dead with the sleep of spiritual exhaustion. It was so her father found her and took her gently in to bed. Life was beginning to take its grim toll of youth and love and innocence.

A few days later another outfit moved away and Heller Sands was jubilant. "By—" he said to Shoop, "that leaves only the big ones. Things are breaking even!"

Sanford was standing night guard about his premises, at his springs and around his stacks of hay. The extra work was straining every resource of men and horses. Selby and Kensett and Pete were drawn to the same still pitch of watchfulness and worry. It seemed that all their talk, all their burden of almost perfect proof, had gone for nothing. With Sheriff Smith lying between life and death down at the county seat, with Travis there too, and with the loss of the two small outfits who had been with them, the bottom had fallen out of everything.

A rain had washed the waters of the Broken Bend to rushing flood and all the Stop Gap stock was back again upon the valley floor.

Ben Sands and his men were everywhere, riding herd on the beef they need not sell so soon now, going about the valley in the big blue car, tightening up the great plan of the future. They tore down the buildings left vacant on the northern small spread and took the lumber home to Stop Gap, thus removing the signs of division there, widening the look of Sands' possessions. Grinning, his eyes as wild as Streaker's were sometimes, the boss looked about him with growing pride and satisfaction.

"Al," he said, "you'll take that place—on the usual terms."

"OK," said Hink.

Thanna, silent and cold these days, watched and listened.

"A man like you," she said under her breath, "rides to his fall that way. I hope you do."

And Sands looked at her with a new light in his eyes, a light she did not like. It was no longer the ingratiating pleasantry of smile and offhand word, but a hard, bold something that was hardening with the passing days. Tied to the immediate vicinity of the house and yard by her inability to get away, she knew nothing of the happenings beyond her narrow confines. No whisper had reached her of Sheriff Smith or Travis or Kensett. She was tense with worry concerning Kensett, hoping against hope he would not return until

he could come so well attended that there could be no danger of gun play between him and Sands. For that was what she feared with a sure instinct. It had been in that dropping motion of Kensett's hand along his thigh.

Gun play—and blood—and death, the old, old certainties where strong men played for the pawns of love or gain.

And both Sands and Kensett were strong men.

Both played for the ancient stakes.

And there was, under all and beyond all, the mysterious link between them evidenced by Kensett's constant questions concerning Sands.

His name—was it always Sands? Where had he come from—Texas? Ever hear him mention Laredo? And his left arm—had she ever seen him with

effort to surmount it. She had been too down in spirit to care, too sorry for the frail woman bound by the dogged loyalty which possessed her. But she would try, and soon.

She saw her fellow prisoner, Jessup, now and then but always Shoop or Hink was in the offing and she had no chance to speak to him on anything that mattered. The boy was a skeleton, his eyes like burning pits, and Thanna knew despairingly that if something didn't happen to release him soon there would be no need. Flood was silent and polite, and Heller didn't trust him too far, she was certain.

And so things stood in the Valley of the Round Stone as the summer reached its height. Blue skies arched above it, peaceful and serene, warm winds fanned it, the Rockface glowed with the rose and gold of dawn, darkened to the purple of the twilights.

And Lilly Brimley, desperate with the



Lily Just Stood and Looked at Heller Across the
Worn Old Counter

his sleeves rolled up? These things tightened the tension in her, stilled her pulse to a deadened, heavy flow. Thinking back she tried to recall the Heller's arms. Had she ever—even in all the years—seen them bare? She could never vision them any way but encased in the checked shirt sleeves he affected. No, to the best of her memory she had never seen Ben Sands with his sleeves rolled up.

And then a thought struck her so forcibly that she wondered why she had been so long stupid in the matter. Esther—her mother. Of course, Esther, his wife, would know. How simple to find out what it was that Kensett wanted to know about Heller Sands' left arm. She would ask her at the first opportunity. Not bluntly, but bringing conversation about to him. This was not so easy, since Esther had withdrawn into herself concerning Sands ever since the day she had refused to leave him. A strange wall of reticence surrounded her and Thanna had made no

passion of her soul, knew she must find the truth or die of anguish. Alone in her fierce partisanship of the man she loved, cut off from the sympathy which her father longed to give her, proudly committed to her course of adoration for Ben Sands, she was a tragic small figure in her new fear.

If Ben Sands did not love her—if all the days—the rides—the dances and the kisses—had been empty things—Lily beat her hands together, stuffed her handkerchief into her pale mouth so she would not cry aloud.

Thanna Wright—Thanna Wright—Thanna Wright—the name of the other girl, young like herself, not old and unlovable like Esther, beat upon her consciousness like a striker on a gong.

And Sands had not been to the store since the day of the fight with Johnny Burk, and Johnny had not been back either. Nor any one from South Bend. A seeming of stalemate lay upon the settlement, the great, still spread of

Continued on Page 24

Even EXCHANGE

THE DREAM OF A DISCONTENTED DREAMER COMES TRUE

by
HARRY
IRVING
SHUMWAY

VERY noon Edwin Longley put on his hat, blew out the tiny alcohol lamp on his work bench, and went out. That shut the door to his life in the big jewelry store where he worked, but opened another door. The door to Adventure.

Nobody would have connected the 5-foot 5, 40-year-old Mr. Longley with Adventure. Never. He was a drab looking little man in face and clothes. Yet Adventure came to him every day in the week.

All he had to do was walk six blocks and there he was—at the waterfront of the city. The Land of True Adventure. Tall masts of spruce, swaying with the swell. Heavy salt air. The murky green restlessness below dock and wharf. Deep, throaty whistles of liners. The rattle and thud of ferries. The put-put-put of saucy, grimy fishing boats. Smell of tar and brine. A marvelous land to which the stationary, globe-trotting Mr. Longley had been coming for 20 years. And never once had he experienced any more of it than a five-cent ride across the harbor!

Now he put on his hat and smiled with delight in anticipation of the coming nautical debauch. But a bulk and a voice stopped him. Mr. Stockleberry, the boss.

"See here, Longley," he said, acidly. "You get back here today on time. Monday you were 15 minutes overtime, Tuesday 20 minutes, and Wednesday half an hour! Half an hour! Who do you think you are? I've warned you before. And if you are late one more time—just one more time—you're through working for us."

In his heart Mr. Longley would have liked to pick at him with hot tweezers! Solder him with hot solder! He hated to be barked at, roared at.

But he said, with the meekness of a lifetime as an employee. "Yes, sir. I'll remember, sir."

"See that you do."

Mr. Longley simmered inside. He walked angrily away—once outside the store. "Some day," he hissed viciously, "I'm going to tell that vile man to go to blazes. I'll tell him to go straight to blazes! Yes sir."

This day he went farther over than usual, the other side of the Channel Bridge. There was some trouble with the draw and he saw a sweet four-master pulled up at a wharf waiting. He noted the name, Mary B. Jaynes, painted on her white side. Not heavily laden. Must be going out.

He went around a group of buildings, down some stairs and wangled a position within jumping distance of the trim



Mr. Hobbs Watched Every Expert Move of the Little Jeweler

ship. Gone were all thoughts of the odious Stockleberry. There were no Stockleberrys anyway, in this delightful land. Lanyards, spare, scuppers, topsails, binnacles—but no Stockleberry!

What a fine ship. He edged up closer, squinted his eyes at the deck, trying to imagine he was on it. He looked up to notice a man lounging against the rail, watching him.

The man wore a blue uniform and was about the size of Mr. Longley, but a lot stockier. Also his color was deeply tanned. He caught Mr. Longley's eye and nodded.

"I was just looking her over," explained the jewelery landlubber. "A fine ship, sir."

"Good enough. We're held up by that draw. It's always giving trouble."

Mr. Longley's mild eyes glistened. "Could I—come aboard?"

The man nodded. "It looks as if we'd be hooked up here for some time. Come aboard if you like."

Mr. Longley made the two-foot jump. This was an opportunity. It was immensely thrilling to stand on the sloping deck, to look up into the shrouds, to imagine the thing rolling on a sea.

"Ah—this is a sort of hobby with me," he explained. "I love ships. I spend my lunch hour exploring around here every day."

"It's good to have a hobby," laughed the other. "I suppose you've been at sea?"

"Never. For years I've wanted to, but—well, I never did."

"Not as lucky as I am with my hobby. Now I can go to sea and work at my hobby at the same time."

"What's yours?"

"Oh, I just monkey around with stones and precious metals. Make myself rings and medals—or try to. Anyway, it's fun. Breaks the long monotony."

"How odd," said Mr. Longley. "Your hobby is my business—and your business is my hobby. I'm a jeweler."

The man showed his interest. "No? Say, come down to my duggings. I want to show you my little workshop. By the way, my name is James Hobbs. I'm first-mate."

"Mine is Edwin Longley—and I wish I were any mate."

They both laughed. Mr. Longley, tingling in every part of him, followed the man down a hatchway, along a horribly fascinating curved passageway and into a low-ceilinged room.

"There," indicated Mr. Hobbs. "There's my outfit. Pretty good!"

Mr. Longley nodded, peered all around. Then he sat down on the sawed-off stool and began inspecting the bench, with all its miniature tools. He picked up a small pin, made of a nugget of gold. "Better try hard solder on this," he advised. "Soft won't hold."

"Say, I wish you'd show me how to hard solder. I'm no good at it."

Mr. Longley looked around. "Where's your blow pipe? And solder. Now the lamp."

It was now Mr. Hobbs' turn to have feverish eyes. He watched every expert move of the little jeweler. In a few minutes the job was done.

"Now that's what I call a shipshape job," nodded Mr. Hobbs. "Let me do one. You check me up, tell me where I go wrong."

They exchanged places. Mr. Hobbs

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AN EPISODE IN SURGERY

BY DIANA PORTER

ROMANCE, TRAGEDY, AND DRAMA IN THE OPERATING ROOM

PH. GOOD morning, Parker! So today is your long awaited day, Senior intern takes a holiday, eh?" And elderly Dr. Edwin Darling stepping into the elevator waiting at the fifth smiled a little wistfully down into the flushed, joyous features of Ann Parker triumphant in street clothes.

"Basement, Bill," said Ann quickly to the stocky young operator.

"Not worried about Lamont catching up to you before you get away from the hospital, are you, Ann? You really shouldn't try to avoid him the way you do. He'll be surgical chief when I retire next year. He'll—"

"Basement, Dr. Parker," announced Bill with his widest grin, sliding the door well back on its smooth mechanism.

Ann quickly stepped out, but only to find an orderly turning from a wall telephone with the stop light gleaming in his eyes.

"Emergency, Dr. Parker. Lamont said to step on it. Surgery 3."

Ann's slight form tensed. The sudden flare in her warm brown eyes smoldered a little. Gathered tears.

"I—I won't go back! He can't do this to me!" she stormed in rising bitterness. "It's been this way ever since I've returned here as a senior intern. Surgery. Surgery! Surgery! Morning, noon, and night! Living in a sterile room. In sterile gowns. Hiding behind a sterile mask. I—I'm fed up!"

"But, Ann—" Dr. Darling's kindly features became taut. Sod.

Ann's soft lips trembled; but her eyes were dark. And rebellious.

Two old, yet very gentle hands grasped Ann's rigid shoulders. Shock her a little. "Ann, listen to me. Remember, I brought you into this world—"

"Please—please don't preach, Dr. Ed. I know when I'm licked. Step on it, Bill"—to the still waiting elevator operator—"intern's holiday indefinitely postponed!"

ANN found young Burton, another senior intern, busy at his steaming wash basin as she entered to scrub up. She liked blond Eric Burton in spite of his keen yen for surgery. He had a host of friendly freckles, and his blue eyes never stopped kidding the world in general; and young nurses in particular.

He grinned, catching the reflection of dark thoughts in the large brown eyes glancing his way.

"Well, well, and if it ain't Parker in the flesh!" he noticed in great amazement. "And me trying to scrub up with my fingers crossed—just so you'd make it this time."

"Ob—skip it, Burt," voiced Ann in grim contralto. She jerked the hot faucet wide open over her basin. Humored the cold. Watched the steam gather-



"I'm a Parker, and a Parker Never Quits!" She Had Snapped

er. Rise. Then with brush and soap plunged her hands down. Scrubbed furiously. After a murderous silence she jerked up her head of sleek black hair. Shook it a little. Attempted a smile in Burton's direction.

"I didn't mean to snap at you, Burt. But I had a date with a permanent this morning. It's only the sixth appointment. Lamont's made me miss. And I'm so nasty and mean inside I don't want to talk. I just can't afford to waste any of the high voltage I'm charging. You know what I mean?"

"Sure, Sure, Parker," he soothed in his pleasing drawl. "Some couples bill and coo. Some grab and bang on. While others, again, just fight themselves into the state of matrimony—like you and Lamont are doing."

Ann quickly lowered her face over her steaming basin and scrubbed like mad for a long moment. "What's the case?" she asked presently.

"Oh—" Burton's handsome head jerked erect. "A kid of seven or so. Jealous husband comes home after a wild night with wild wife and takes a pot shot at his wife. But he hits the kid instead. They have him in there now with a couple of donors trying to get him pepped up so we can operate. But I've a hunch they're only wasting good blood."

Thrusting his freckled arms into a gown a nurse held, he added: "That's it, Parker. Get into your gown, and we'll go into together—and be decent to La-

mont. He's worried over the kid. That's why he almost broke a leg trying to find you before you left this morning. I wish someone would give me a break sometime by asking especially for me. Well—let's go."

The surgeon in Burton sought the still, covered form on the operating table. The woman in Ann sought a tall, lanky man of 40 in sterile gown, cap, and mask.

One searching glance into the bloodless features of the small boy and Burton realized with a stab of regret that his hunch would win. A quicker, shorter glance into the ice-gray eyes of the tallest surgeon in the room, and Ann alternately thawed and froze.

Burton motioned his assistants aside. Jerked off his mask, revealing strong, rather handsome features, other than they did seem emotionally cold. At the moment they were heavy with fatigue. Only the light gray eyes betrayed the inner man as they lingered for a precious moment on Ann's brumetic beauty.

"Thanks for coming, Parker. But—"

The quiet, almost hushed baritone hesitated. Muscular shoulders of football history lifted expressively. Large gloved hands spread with palms up.

Ann stepped forward to the patient. Lowered her capped head while her eyes clung to the pale features of the small patient. Suddenly her nostrils flared. Her head jerked.

"He's still breathing!"

"Yes, I know," quietly agreed Lamont; then added: "And bleeding—

somewhere inside. The blood is pouring out as fast as we can put it in. And I haven't been able to locate the bullet."

A smile twisted Lamont's thin lips. "Go ahead, Parker. Probe all you want. He's going to die anyway."

Ann's high tension snapped in a verbal explosion of white-hot anger. "Listen to me—all of you. I'm a Parker, and a Parker never quits! My father—were he here—would operate if this boy had but one breath left. He'd always gamble with Death when a human life was at stake—"

Lamont stirred his long length into action. "Very well, Parker. We'll see what you can do. Nurse; fresh gloves and mask. Burton, you assist Parker on her side. I'll be opposite."

She forced her eyes to meet Lamont's cold glance; forced herself to say:

"Dr. Lamont, I'm sorry I blew up . . . I'm ready."

Burton swabbed the bared, bullet-punctured abdomen, while everyone stood at tense attention awaiting Lamont's final instructions—if any.

"This case is going to be messy," he informed, glancing about at the quiet, masked face with watching eyes. Then he bit at his words to add: "Watch your clamps!"

Ann selected a keen-edged from the instrument table, and with an accurate gesture incised the small abdomen.

"Clamp!" came the terse command, and the battle for the young boy's life was under way.

The incision bared the bloody path the bullet had plowed through tender and vital tissues. Ann quickly realized, along with Lamont and Burton, and flanked now by the chief surgeon himself, that there was no hope of saving the boy. Yet they continued their suturing, and performed two resections on the torn intestines.

Finally, clamps drew the incised abdomen together again, and Lamont ordered a second transfusion. But it wasn't long before Ann slipped the stethoscope from her ears, and chewed a little on her full lower lip.

Lamont catching her sad glance, shrugged his tired shoulders and turned to the huge window in one end of the surgery. After a long moment he wheeled to face Ann, still standing mutely by the operating table.

"Let's change, Parker," he said in the most casual tone at his command. "Then we'll slip out for waffles and coffee. After all, this is your day off."

Ann impatiently waved the suggestion aside. Choked: "I—I'm not hungry."

Lamont jerked off his apron and gloves, and threw them across the large room.

"Neither am I, Parker. I'm sick of this whole messy, grisly business. You're sick of it too. You have been for a long time—and I don't blame you. Let's get out of here and forget we were ever doctors. I've always wanted to live in the country near a good trout stream."

Ann's eyes widened. Nostrils flared. Jaws set a little. Sensitive lips trembled under the rush of spoken thoughts.

"Dr. Lamont—you a quitter! You a brilliant surgeon, wanting to forget. Wanting to forget—what? That tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow there will be patients waiting, and looking to you for a chance at future health; perhaps a chance for their very lives. God gave you that precious gift for surgery, and now—and now—"

Ann wheeled to the door into the corridor, and Dr. Darling jerked out a long arm and caught her close. He smiled tenderly down at her capped head.

"Here—here, Ann. Cry on my shoulder—this one. It hasn't been cried on for a long time now—that's the girl . . . My dear, you were magnificent—you are magnificent. Now listen, Ann: Lamont and I have a confession to make. For weeks we have been canceling your days off, hoping and almost praying that some day a really hopeless case would come in here, and we could interest you in trying to save a dying patient."

"You see, my dear, you were slipping—turning against surgery. Turning against it because a newer, greater interest had taken possession of your heart—love. And as much as Lamont and I both love you, we couldn't let you toss aside this precious talent you have for surgery."

"Then this morning it happened. That child didn't have the slightest chance of living, but you did a beautiful job of trying to save him. You did more than that, Ann. You showed me that you're really a chip off the old Parker block. My dear, you have really found yourself at last. Now"—raising a tearful, but happy face—"get out of here. I've a busy schedule for today. And, Burton; scrub up, and stand by for Dr. Deems in surgery 1. He asked especially for you."

The chief surgeon failed to see the happiness in Burton's eyes, as he was watching Lamont's long legs jump to open the door for Ann. Her upward glance to the tall surgeon was swift, but oh so sweet!

"Dr. Darling," interrupted a youthful nurse with the late boy's history. "Any further remarks to add to this case?"

The elderly doctor growled a bit in his thick throat as he read the chart. Then thinking again of how a brilliant young surgeon had found herself before it was too late, he accepted the nurse's pen and scrawled in his large sprawling hand:

*Thank God—
for this episode
in surgery—
E. Darling
Chief surgeon*

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Poems

NEW AND OLD
FAVORITES

MOWING

THERE was never a sound beside the used
T but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to
the ground,
What was it it whispered? I knew not well
myself;
Perhaps of sun something about the heat of
the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—
And that was it it whispered and did not
speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or the grandeur of the hand of fair or elf:
Aphrodite more than the truth would have
seemed too weak
To the earnest love that bid the suns in
rest,
Not without fiery-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pinks, orchises), and scented a bright green
smoke.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor
knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to
make.

—ROBERT FASSET.

POOR FISH!

HE ALWAYS acts so uppish,
And frowns on those who're poor.
In this place, where he's always lived,
His standing is secure.
He's arrogant—a perfect snob.
Because someone, before him,
Worked hard and left him lots of wealth,
He thinks an should adore him.
He's never done one thing to earn
A person's admiration;
And if he lived where merit counts,
He'd hold a lowly station.
Though he's a whale in his wee pool,
Somehow I have the notion:
In any other spot, he'd be
A small fish—in an ocean!

—LYLA MYERS.

SAY NOT THAT BEAUTY

SAY not that beauty is an idle thing
And gathered lightly as a sunrise flower
That on the trembling verges of the spring
Knows but the sweet survival of an hour,
For 'tis an act—. Thrushes dedicated days
And folded curtains of deliberate nights
With secret and avowed intent the wags
That lead to the far confines of delights,
Not with the earthy eye and fleshly ear,
But lifted far above mortality,
We are at least the eternal hills, and hear
The singing of the universal sea;
And kneeling breathless in the holy place
We know immortal Beauty face to face.

—ROBIN FLOWER.

WE MET ON ROADS OF LAUGHTER

WE MET on roads of laughter,
Both careless at the start,
But other roads came after
And wound around my heart.
There are roads a wise man misses,
And roads where fools will try
To say farewell with kisses,
Touch love and say goodbye.
We met on roads of laughter;
Now wintry roads depart,
For I must hurry after
To overtake my heart.

—CHARLES DIVINE.

THE GRAND RIVER DITCH

I USED to wend my way along
Through little shady nooks,
And welcomed all the streams that joined
From little meadow brooks.
Many pleasant forest trees
Did grace my rugged banks;
Raccoon, opossum and bob cats
Were numbered in our ranks.
Red foxes sought my rocky clefts
In safety there, they'd dwell.
Above my wildest torrent rose,
You could hear the wood owl's yell.
But now I'm just a man-made ditch
Bulking through the land,
No rocky falls to rattle o'er
No ferns, no shifting sand.
Strong steel bridge gird my banks,
The aspines fly above,
But I know my old familiar haunts
Was what the wood folas loved.

—MRS. OTIS SHAW BRUNS.

THE CARDINAL

VELVET notes that come
From winter leafy trees—
'Tis a singing cardinal
Singing songs to me.
Loving life and mate,
Truly on a note;
Soft, sweet!—Beauty's shape
Throbbing in his throat.
If the springtime flowers
Come to rosy red song,
A field of dancing, singing flowers
No sweater song could bring.
Music of a stream—
Slipping down the sea—
Sweet, sweet! Bird of song,
Singing songs to me.

—MILDRED H. HOMMER.

SAND DUNES AND SEA

B LUE skies and bluer sea with its white
B teeth showing,
Gold dunes made sweet by yellow jasmine
growing.
And over sand and sea a keen wind blowing.
Gray skies and grayed days and the years
swift going.
Youth's golden dunes all white with winter's snowing
And in my heart the bitter wind of memory
blowing.

—JOHN KIRCHAS MCGOWAN.

A WASTED DAY

I SPOILED the day;
Hastily, as haste,
all the calm hours
I pushed and defaced.
Let me forget,
Let me embark—
Sleep for my dole—
And sail through the dark.
Till a new day
Heaven shall send,
While as an exile,
Rest as a friend.

—FRANCES CROPPARD.

EVEN EXCHANGE

Continued from Page 11

manipulated his large hands like wringing them out in dry air. Then he went to work on another pin. Mr. Longley showed him how to fashion a pin from gold wire, point it and make a loop.

It was a delicate job. Time and time again the sailorman had to stop, work his fingers from cramps and begin over. Finally he got the job done. Polished it on a foot-lathe.

"Say, that's wonderful. You make it seem so simple."

Mr. Longley laughed. "In a couple of months I'd make a fair jeweler of you."

"No? By George, I wish I had you for a teacher." He hesitated. "Would you show me how to work up a ring?"

"That's quite a job. But I don't mind. Where's your gold?"

Mr. Longley got everything together, checked up on every detail. Then they went to work. Slowly the thing grew. To Mr. Hobbs it was like magic. And finally there was a gold ring, made from just metal, shining and graceful.

"By George, you're marvelous, Longley. I have never seen anything so fascinating for years. I know it's an imposition, but would you show me how to set a cluster of stones in a brooch? See? I've got a box of stones here. How about a moonstone and garnet design?"

They worked out a design on paper. Then scratched it on white wax. The stones were laid in place. Then they went to work. This was a major job and even Mr. Longley had to devote his entire attention to it. Mr. Hobbs took off his tie and rolled up his sleeves. He was like a man in a dream. On they worked, heads bent over the alcohol lamp.

The door opened and a tall man entered. "Good afternoon, Mr. Hobbs. Will you be good enough to take the wheel? Your watch, sir."

Mr. Longley blinked. Horrified he blurted out, "Why—why the ship is moving!"

"Quite so," observed the captain. "Moving on to Valparaiso, Chile. We are off the Gravies now."

Mr. Longley gulped, looked helplessly at Mr. Hobbs. "How—how long—" "Eight weeks—there and back." Then he smiled. "But we could put you off at the Canal. Sorry this happened. By the way, you could send a radio message."

"Eight weeks," observed Mr. Longley. He sniffed, stared about him. A different smell met his nostrils. A different world rose and fell beneath his feet. He took a deep, deep breath.

"A radio message. Thank you. I'd like to say—Mr. Stockleberry, Stockleberry and Company, Boston, Mass. I am going to Valparaiso, Chile, and you can go to hades." Ah—that's all. And Mr. Hobbs, may I—could I take my first lesson at the wheel?"

SWIFT WATER

Continued from Page 6

his soft hat at a more rakish angle, answered:

"Still hangin' on for that promise of salvation."

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTOPHER WYNNE paced back and forth in the living-room of old Hollyhock House, now the parsonage. A charming room of early Nineteenth Century design. The doorways with ornamental features modeled in low relief, the soapstone lining of the fireplace, the floor boards of painted pine, the portrait of a woman in yellow satin, massive topaz earrings and necklace, set into the woodwork above the mantel, had been in place to welcome the first Randolph bride to Garton. The only modern touch was the piano in one corner.

From beneath veiling lashes Constance Wynne watched her brother. His restlessness was out of character, especially on Sunday afternoons when he was apt to be relaxed after the morning service. Sally-May reading near the window was out of character too. She couldn't remember an hour since they had come to Garton when the child had sat so still. Only once had she stirred and that was to answer the telephone. Flora Calvin had been on the wire. Sally-May had been somewhat snappy in answer. Constance had caught the infection if not the content of her reply. A tiff, probably, which accounted for Sally-May's presence at home. She spoke to her niece:

"Stop reading by that poor light, dear. You will ruin your eyes."

To her surprise the girl obeyed without protest. Constance regarded her unceasingly. What did her unusual docility mean? Was she ill? At sound of the closing book the red-setters, stretched on the hearth rug back to the fire, languidly raised observant heads, languidly thumped inquiring tails. Christopher stopped his restless pacing to smooth Sally-May's short hair, to demand affectionately:

"How does it happen that you're at home? Thought that the W. Vs. met in

the cabin on Sunday afternoons."

His niece avoided his eyes as she answered:

"Days are so short that Flo and I had our conference after morning service. The big girls go up on the hill to snoop on us. We fooled them today."

"Which girls?"

"Fanchon Farrell, Sue Calvin and their crowd."

"Does Miss Randolph go?" Christopher inquired casually, too casually, Constance decided. Lately she had begun to suspect that Jean Randolph interested him. She had sensed his keen attention whenever her name was mentioned. Suppose he were to care for her seriously? It couldn't happen. It wasn't charming as she was she was inherently selfish, worldly, altogether pagan. She the wife of a minister! The suggestion would be laughable—if Christopher were not the minister in question. Sally-May's voice recalled her wandering thoughts.

"Gee whiz! You'd been rippon' mad, old lamb pie, if you'd seen her driving along the street just as the bells were ringing for church. She had golf clubs and tennis rackets hanging all over her yellow and black roadster and she was nodding and smiling to the other girls as though she were thinking:

"Poor boobs! Running after the minister!"

"Sally-May!" thundered Christopher, "Didn't I tell you never to refer to that remark of Jean's again?"

So, he thought of her as "Jean," Constance reflected. Oh, it was unbearable that out of thousands of parishes, he should have settled in Garton, that out of millions of girls in the world this one should have interested him. If only she would return to her mother, Mother! Hugh Randolph's wife. She had to keep reminding herself that he had a wife. Sally-May's reply to her uncle's stern question switched Constance's train of thought back to her surroundings.

"Pull yourself together, Uncle Chris. If you knew of the missionary work Flo and I—" the shrill call of the telephone interrupted. She dashed to the door. The two reporters anticipated her exit by a second. "I'll answer. I'm sure it's for me. Flo said she would call again." In an instant her voice drifted back from the hall:

"Hullo!—Yes!—No! I don't." Followed a few indistinguishable words as though her mouth were close to the receiver. Then scathingly: "Don't be a quitter. Haven't the W. Vs. a mission? I'll bet you're scared. Jelly fish! No stiffening in the spine. You belong with the Foolish Virginians. Better give your courage lamp to someone else—Well, perhaps, before dark. You should worry. It's



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her own fault. Better stick round for the finish. Got to go. Helga's going to teach me how to make scenes for tea. Goo'by!"

Running steps kitchenward. The joyous yelps of dogs. Christopher looked at his sister.

"What's up? Why should Flo be scared? Fee—F—F—Fum! I smell mischief. What the dickens has Sally-May up her sleeve now?"

"Something. I'm ashamed to acknowledge it, but, she's been too good to be true ever since she stole in for dinner like a nice, sleek pussy-cat purring for her cream."

"Didn't she come home with you?"

"No. You heard her say that she and Flo had a conference after church." Constance felt the color burn in her cheeks as she ventured hesitatingly:

"Chris—I don't mean to be a pest, to meddle in your life, but—but—I am uneasy about you. You—you aren't becoming interested in Jean Randolph, are you?"

The old room was still. To the woman eagerly awaiting her brother's reply it seemed to be listening, listening for one more story to be added to the files of a century; the tick of the tall clock in the corner seemed to echo rhythmically:

"Are you? Are you? Are you?"

Christopher Wyane leaned an arm on the mantel, looked down into the red coals as he asked gravely:

"Suppose I am?"

Constance in a deep chair before the fire clasped her hands about her knees. That low answer of her brother's had set them shaking. A premonition of disaster? The burning logs cast witch-fire shadows across her eyes, her voice was unsteady as she warned:

"You'll be unbearably hurt, Chris. Shut her out of your heart before it is too late."

"No use in closing the door now, Con. She's in."

"Chris! Chris! Why did you let yourself care for her?"

"Let myself! She was in before I knew it. She took possession the day I held up her roadster at the Crossroads."

"Have you never tried to put her out?"

"Not very hard."

"You have always said you would not marry a girl with money, and she is heir to all the confesses has, to all her father's wealth, to all of her mother's."

"I know it. I still think it a mistake. But—I'm not exactly a pauper. I have a small income besides my salary—though I may not have that last long."

"Then you mean to hold out against taking part in raising this money?"

"I do. I have been here a year. I have put the best of myself into the work. I feel that I am beginning to make good. It will be a terrific wrench to give it up."

especially to be asked to resign from this charge. I may be wrong in my attitude—but—it seems right to me and I'll stick to it."

"Then you are right to stick. A wobbler takes two steps back for one ahead. But, about Jean Randolph, she never will marry a clergymen—perhaps if you persist in refusing to raise that money—you will give up your profession—then you might have a chance with her."

"Do you think I would marry a girl who would want me to give up my profession? When I began to consider entering the ministry I consulted the wisest man among my acquaintances, a wisest man among my acquaintances, a of the church."

"Even after that I turned the matter over in my mind for weeks. Then I decided. I shall not retreat. You are unfair to Jean Randolph, Con. You don't look below the flippant surface. I know by the fine, sweet line of her mouth that she isn't the sort who would pry a man from his life-work, force him into some other occupation more pleasing to her."

"My dear, she is! She is! You are the one who won't look below the surface. Everyone says that she is engaged to Harvey Brooke, that she is merely waiting until the visiting preacher's father is over before she marries him. He is distinctly her kind, Chris. Young, rich, good-looking enough, with an easy-going tolerance of unethical practices—I've talked with him a couple of times. He calls it being progressive, liberal, freedom of thought.

"You are generous and understanding, Chris, but—please try to put Jean Randolph out of your mind and your life. If you don't you will be horribly hurt."

Christopher laid his long-fingered hands gently on his sister's shoulders, smiled whimsically down into her imploring brown eyes.

"I will be horribly hurt if I do, Con, so there you are. If she really is engaged to Brooke that settles it. But I'll

keep her in my heart and take the consequences." He listened. "Someone coming up the front walk. In a hurry. The visitor is not for me or he would have come to the library door. I'll let him in."

He went into the hall. Constance heard him say:

"You, Mr. Randolph? What's wrong?" he asked.

She swallowed her heart which had begun to make merry in her throat. Who was she to counsel Christopher when the sound of a man's voice—a married man at that—set her pulses hammering? She clasped her unsteady hands tight behind her as Hugh Randolph entered. His grave eyes betrayed his smile as he announced without preamble:

"I know that I've come on a fool's errand, of course she wouldn't be here, but, I'm trying to locate Jean. She played golf with Harvey Brooke this morning. He promised to join her at Hill Top for luncheon. He saw her start off in her roadster. I judge from his confused apology that he was drawn into a game of poker at the club which lasted till about 20 minutes ago. Then he came pelting to my home after Jean to explain."

"She didn't come home. We can't find her. Came here as a last resort. Of course nothing has happened to her but the memory of that college girl who disappeared—Couldn't get you by phone. Your line is out of order."

"Our line out of order? Sally-May was using it only a few minutes ago. I wonder—" Constance ran to the hall. The telephone transmitter dangled on its cord. Of course Central couldn't make connection. A sudden suspicion wriggled into her mind. Had Sally-May left it off the hook to stop Flora Calvin's insistence? Insistence about what? She recalled her niece's impatient protest.

"I bet you're scared. Jelly-dish! No stiffening in the spine. Well, perhaps before dark. It's her own fault."

What had she meant by "it's her own fault"? Whose fault? Could the two girls be responsible for Jean's disappearance? Hurredly she returned. Christopher, white, cool, steady, Hugh Randolph, flushed and anxious, were near the door. From the threshold of the library which opened from the living room, Sally-May peered inquisitorily through the strong lenses of her shell-rimmed spectacles. Suspicion crystallized to conviction as Constance looked at her. She accused sternly:

"Sally May, have you seen Jean?"

Christopher and Hugh Randolph on their way to the hall stopped. Constance suggested sharply:

"Don't go yet Chris." She repeated.



sanced judgment, just enough of old Plymouth Rock to help him withstand the breakers of opposition; a sense of humor which revivifies, like a refreshing shower after a heated day; sympathetic understanding, tenderness, which is so much more than kindness; and more than all this, a deep and abiding faith in the living God, in the divine in man. I wish—I wish that I might believe as he does."

Constance's voice was unsteady as she asked softly:

"Can't you?"

"No. The old argument. If there is an all-seeing God, why does he permit the infernos of life? Discipline, of course. Well, I've had, am having mine. Why should it continue? For the last year I have fought my passionate longing for divorce. I won't have Jean's future wrecked by our mistakes. The child of divorced parents starts off on the wrong foot. My wife is content to let conditions remain as they are. Modern as she is, she realizes that unless she could pose as a martyr—I refuse to be branded as either libertine or monster. Madeline may gain her freedom unmarred—she would lose some of her public. For Jean's sake I feel that we should hang together any old way—but there are times—" he took an impetuous step forward, caught her hands.

"Constance—"

She interrupted passionately:

"Oh, not No! Please—I—"

His hold tightened till it hurt.

"You have answered my unspoken question."

He released her, crossed the threshold. Stony Constance watched him go. She tried to call. Her throat contracted, shut off her voice. She heard the outer door open. Into the room stole the rhythm of bells. She glanced at the clock. The carillon recital was beginning with Verdi's Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX

"**S**TILL hangin' on for that promise of salvation!"

Jean's surprise merged into defiant anger before the mocking suggestion in the voice of the man whose green eyes glinted beyond the bars. Thank heaven they were iron. Impregnable as Gibraltar they would resist attack. Good old padlock. She could rely on that too. She'd rather be locked in than out in this predicament. She opened her lips to reply, closed them as from the sky came a shower of enchanting notes which woke the echoes. The bells grew in power till the universe throbbed with their magic and their music. Far off she could see a tiny light in the church tower where the carillonneur sat at his mighty keyboard. It was like a beacon by which to steer her course. Her voice reflected her sense of se-

curity as she suggested:

"You really are wasting your time. The person, as you call him, won't come here." Faintly, delicately rippled the bells, deepened into chords. The man laughed.

"I'll take my chance—"

"Yoo-hoo-o-o! Jean! Where are you? It's Harvey!"

Jean's heart leaped in relief. Harvey Brooke! Thank heaven. The man crashed his face against the bars, whispered hoarsely:

"Who's that?"

"Didn't you hear him say, 'Harvey?' I suggest that you get out of the way before he comes. He wouldn't fall for that 'salvation' stuff. Not after he had seen your eyes. He might—"

He had gone, thank heaven. She was talking to space. She drew a long sigh of relief, called eagerly:

"Harvey! Harvey! I'm here!"

She saw Brooke emerge from the green gloom of the trail, look about in perplexity. His hat was on the back of his head, a wavy lock of light hair stuck to a forehead damp with perspiration. His face was deeply flushed. Not too steady on his feet, was Harvey. She hated him like that. He was still in the sports clothes he had worn in the morning. Curious that he hadn't changed to lunch with the contessa. She pressed her face close to the bars and called again:

"I'm in the cabin."

He sprouted toward her, stopped as he met her eyes. Accused indignantly:

"For Pet's sake, what are you doing in there?"

Jean matched his indignation. Why didn't he let her out? She countered flippantly:

"Came here to meditate on my sins, angel boy."

He flung his hat on the ground before he perched on the boulder and pulled out his cigaret case.

"Yeah, you did. Well, go to it. I won't interrupt. You need meditation and

then some. Better concentrate on the lousy way you treat me."

Jean capitulated.

"Don't be a crab, Harvey. Do you think I'd stay in this stuffy place unless I had to? I'm locked in."

Brooke slid off the boulder.

"Locked in? Honest? How come?"

"That detestable—" Jean bit off the sentence, she wouldn't tell tales on Sally-May and Flora Calvin—"lock snapped. I was looking about my old playhouse and before I knew it I was shut in." The truth. Skillfully jugged to meet the situation, but, still—the truth.

Brooke produced his keys. Tried one after another, not too steadily. Growled:

"It's one of those infernal Yale locks. Perhaps I can work a window bar loose. Try on your side."

As Jean pulled and pushed he caught her hand. Drew her close to the bars. Exulted:

"I've got you! You'll kiss me before I let you go."

"I can't imagine a more unsatisfactory way to kiss," suggested a cool voice behind him.

Christopher Wynne! At the entrance to the upper trail with two red setters as still as two bronze dogs beside him. Jean's recoil from the surprise of his appearance was expeditious by the sudden loosening of Brooke's grip on her wrist. His grin was sheepish as he faced the man standing behind him. He acknowledged boyishly:

"I'll say it is, Mr. Wynne. But, the situation isn't quite so raw as it seems. I've been wild with anxiety about Jean. When I saw her car parked on the river road relief went to my head. She won't say she'll marry me till she leaves here—she won't let me kiss her until the engagement's announced. Not so good."

Jean seethed with embarrassment. To be caught in such a ridiculous situation was bad enough, without Harvey's apologetic explanation. She mocked:

"You ought to be called the Babbling Brooke, Harvey. If you must tell the story of your young life leave out my part in it. Now—that Sir Galahad has arrived perhaps I'll get out of this friendless place."

"How can he do better than I if he hasn't a key?" demanded Brooke aggrievedly.

Jean noted the keenness of Wynne's eyes as they rested on his face. There was a thread of steel in his friendly voice as he announced:

"I have a key. I will let Jean out. Hustle off to Hollyhook House in your car, will you, and reassure Mr. Randolph?"

Brooke hesitated.

"But, Jean—"

"Her car is parked on the river road, you said. She will have to drive that back, anyway. Even though Sally-May assured Mr. Randolph that Jean was here, he'll be anxious until he knows that she is safe."

His voice had hardened when



he spoke of Sally-May. Did he know that his detestable niece had locked her in? How was he going back to Hock House? Not with her, if she had to stall her engine to avoid taking him. Of course her father ought to be reassured, but she could get there quite as soon.

"Harvey——" she called through the bars.

Without waiting for her to finish the sentence Brooke answered:

"I'm going. Sweetness, I'll burn up the road."

He plunged down the darkening trail. Jean retreated to the fireplace. She could hear a dog snuffing about the cabin, from a distance came the frenzied yelp of his twin. Christopher Wayne approached the window.

"Sally-May confessed—not voluntarily, the truth was wrung from her—after your father and Brooke had turned the town upside down in their search for you. She's a naughty child at times. She will apologize for this and in some way make restitution. Meanwhile—Sir Galahad, you do me too much honor—will let you out, that is," he laughed, "if you'll promise to be good."

Jean returned to the window. Inquired crisply:

"Does that mean that I'm to promise to go to church? I won't. I'll never go to church. Never—" "Under compulsion," she qualified to herself.

Christopher Wayne stepped back. Did he mean to desert her? Her breath caught in her throat. A key clicked. The door was flung open. His voice was grave as he assured:

"You are free."

She crossed the threshold into the fresh, spicy air. Drew a long breath. Turned her back upon Christopher to look at the western sky, all crenelated pink walls, mauve tipped pinnacles of clouds.

He asked gravely:

"Why do you think that I'd force you to church? Not to mine. You would be a distracting element."

She faced him to demand indignantly: "Distressing to the congregation?"

"Possibly, though I was not thinking of that. It is growing dark. Let's go." "Thank you. I shall be quite safe. You may go back up the hill, the way you came."

Her laugh sent curious little prickle-quicks along her veins.

"Oh no, I'll see you through the woods. Do you realize how the scars in your voice sets your eyes shining? They are like brilliants. Are you angry because I sent Brooke off? It was my chance to talk with you. The moment I enter a room you slide out of it. Remember I told you that there was no reason why a man in my profession couldn't be an honest-to-goodness lover—and lovers from time immemorial have been granted a certain latitude. I—hear the Rover Boys? They have tried something."

Had he changed the subject on purpose or had he really heard the dogs? Jean listened. A stealthy stir in the underbrush! Her heart stopped. Pound ed heavily on.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK
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TOURISTS ACCOMMODATED

Continued from Page 3

with its bright quilt and lace-edged pillow shams; the wash stand brave in an array of flowered china, two cane rocking chairs and a tall bureau with an oval swing glass. Everything clean and comfortable and strangely suggestive of a past generation.

Mr. Bamister had touched the bed. "Gosh," he said, "feathers!"

Maggie was eagerly on guard.

"Yes. It's . . . it's a good big full tick. My mother made it for me when I was married. It's awful soft."

"A feather bed," the woman said, looking at her husband. "That's one thing I've never slept on."

Maggie bustled about still fearful of a sudden change in their plans.

"Now I'll bring you up warm water to wash with . . . an' here's a new cake of soap in the dish here, an' when you're ready just come right down an' make yourselves at home. Would you like your supper real early?"

"Well, I guess an early supper would suit us pretty well," the man said.

"Then I'll hurry it right up," Maggie responded, "an' mind now, just make yourselves real comfortable."

SHE was turning the ham in the big iron skillet when the strangers at last came down stairs. They entered the

kitchen slowly, almost shyly, their eyes apparently taking in at a glance the freshly set table with its huge platter of home-made bread, the pound print of butter, the jellies and preserves in their heavy glass dishes; the plates turned down over the knives and forks. They sniffed the stove odors ravenously.

"I've never smelled anything so good in my life," the woman said coming close to Maggie. "It's not ham!"

"My yea. I do hope you'll like it. It's our own curin'."

The woman turned toward her husband. "Do we like ham, Sammy? Real country cured ham?"

For answer the man, Sammy, did an odd thing. He put his arm around his wife and kissed her. Then he turned apologetically to Maggie.

"Don't mind us," he said. "You see we were pretty much all in when we got here . . . You know how it is when you're making a long trip, you get sort of tired and low-spirited. Well, this place here just seems to suit us about right!"

"It does!" Maggie breathed. "My, my, but I'm pleased you like it. Now, why don't you take a little walk around through the orchard maybe or somewhere while I'm finishin' the supper. I'll ring the bell when it's ready."

They smiled at her and went out.

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From the stove Maggie could watch them starting off along the path to the spring, their clasped hands swinging between them.

"An' I don't think they're birds and groans either. It's just . . . just that they still like each other."

When David came in, he carefully concealed the astonishment he really felt at sight of the dusty coupe and the preparations afoot in the kitchen.

Maggie rushed to meet him, her eyes shining.

"We got two tourists, David, a man an' his wife—an' they're pleased as anything. I sent them out for a walk while I dash up the supper. An' they caught me gatherin' eggs, mind, after all the days I been watchin' the lane! An' she's as pretty as a picture, an' he's nice an' gentlemanlike . . ."

"What are you chargin' 'em?" David asked as he washed his hands in the basin on the bench.

"My goodness, we ain't got round to talkin' about that yet. But they're so pleased an' all, I'm goin' to say two an' a half for the both of them for everything. They can run the car into the shed, can't they, David?"

"I don't care where they run it," David answered gruffly. From the tall of her eye, though, Maggie noticed that he was slicking back his tousled hair at the small kitchen mirror with unusual care.

When the supper was all on the table, Maggie rang the bell. She and David listening in a tense silence heard the voices of the tourists as they approached.

"And the orchard, Sammy, with the smell of the apples! And that little run down in the meadow?"

"Yeah and the cows. Gosh, I don't believe I've seen so near a cow in my life. Funny brutes!"

"When we get rich, Sammy, let's buy a farm!"

"Yeah, when we get rich!" The man's tone was incredibly bitter.

"Now, now, none of that," the woman said quickly. "It was to be chins up, wasn't it?"

In another moment they had passed the kitchen window and were at the door. Maggie met them, beaming, introduced David (who grunted in reply) and then seated them at the table. She herself did not sit down, for as she explained, she wanted to fry the eggs the very last minute. Would they have them turned or unturned? The two strangers looked at each other, then the woman broke into a low laugh, pleasant to hear.

"Sammy, it's ham and eggs! Oh Mrs. Tweedy, Sam would rather have that than roast turkey!"

"My, ain't that fine!" said Maggie. "Turned or unturned, Mr. Bannister?"

"Turned," said the man Sam, "for both of us."

As the meal progressed even Maggie, nervous as she was, could have no doubt about her guests' appreciation of the food.

"My sakes," she thought to herself, "they eat as if they hadn't had a bit for a week! My, I'm glad they're so easy pleased!"

Then aloud. "Mr. Bannister, you'll have another fried egg, won't you, just to come out even with that piece of ham?"

When the last piece of apple pie had been cut and the last cup of coffee poured, Maggie surveyed her guests with a satisfaction bordering upon pride. Mr. Bannister looked like a young man now; his eyes were bold and bright, his cheeks were flushed and he was cracking the funniest jokes. And Mrs. Bannister! That strained look was all gone from her face, and she was laughing all the time and teasing her husband. It was just a sight for sore eyes to watch the two of them.

Mrs. Bannister would take no telling about the dish washing. She was bound to help, and Maggie couldn't stop her. Sam, as she called him, carried the dishes to the sink and kept untying the strings of the big gingham apron his wife, Lena, had put on. Just like a boy he was!

Mrs. Bannister talked so funny too.

"No mink coat for my Christmas gift this year, Sam. The pearls can wait, too. What I want is a cook stove like this with a tea kettle and a b—g iron skillet!" she said.

"What kind of a stove have you got?" Maggie asked innocently. Then she wished she hadn't for the woman turned slowly toward her, with her eyes filled. You couldn't tell it by her voice though. She kept it very bright.

"Why we've never really kept house," she said. "In the city things are so different. And we've moved around so much."

"But . . . but your meals?" asked Maggie wonderingly.

"Oh we go out for them. Restaurants, you know, or . . . or boarding houses. It's really . . . lots of fun."

"My, it must be," said Maggie wistfully. "Why, where's Mr. Bannister?"

"I guess he's just gone outside," Lena said quietly. "I'll go after him and tell him we're going to watch you milk."

When the milking was over and they had seen the big crocks settled in the clear cool water of the spring house, Sam and Lena took one more walk around the orchard and then sat down on the back porch where David was already slouched ready to step.

"Travellin' far?" he asked now.

"New York," Sam said briefly, "if the wheels stay on."

"About another good day of it, then."

"Yep. With luck we ought to get there tomorrow night."

Maggie had made the gesture of lighting the lamp in the parlor, but the tourists preferred the porch. When it was really dark, they moved closer to each other and conferred in low tones. Then Sam spoke casually.

"Ever go to any shows, Mrs. Tweedy?"

"Shows? Me?" said Maggie. "Why sometimes the young folks have a play at the church. I go to them when I can."

"You don't have a radio?"

"No," Maggie said wistfully. "oh, my, no."

There was a pause and then Sam said, "Lena and I've been in the show business off and on for some years. Now, it's all radio, you know, so we have a sort of chance . . ."

"It's a swell chance," Lena broke in eagerly. "This friend of ours wired for us to come on. He's just got a job himself and he thinks he can help us land one. It's virtually certain once we get to New York."

"Sure," said Sammy, smiling at her. "So we have a few little leftover acts from vaudeville and our new radio stuff, and we just wondered if you'd like us to . . . well . . . you know, stage a little show for you right here."

"For us?" Maggie whispered.

"Sure! Want us to?" "David, they're actors, mind! An' goin' honest I can't believe it! If you aren't givin' us the surprise of our lives. My, my, come right on into the parlor!"

"Have you a musical instrument there?" Lena asked.

"No," Maggie said regretfully. "I wanted a nice parlor-organ all my life, but we just never seemed to get ahead enough to buy one."

"That's all right," Lena said hastily. "I think the kitchen's the place anyway, Sam. That floor's made to tap on."

From that moment, the tourists took charge. Yet not quite the tourists. Rather it was Bannister & Bannister, one time of the big circuits, lately of none at all. It was they who pushed the table to the corner, who arranged a newspaper shade on the cheap drop light, who



drew aside the braided rag rugs, and told Maggie and David just where to sit.

Then for an hour and a half the show went on. Maggie leaned forward in her chair, her lips parted like a child's, her eyes starting from her head in astonishment and a delight that bordered on ecstasy. The dancing. The singing! The funny little "dialogs" they gave that made her laugh harder than she'd ever done in her life. Even David laughed out loud once, mind! And every time Mr. Bannister would say, "Well, I guess that's enough," Mrs. Bannister would think up another one and start right in with it. My! My! In all her days she had never dreamed there were people smart enough to do all the things they did. It made you laugh your wits away and yet sort of touched you too. The way they smiled and sang together. Him dancing with his arm round her waist and her looking up into his eyes! Oh my! My!

At last even Mrs. Bannister admitted that they had done enough and they both sank wearily on the kitchen chairs. Maggie moistened her lips and spoke.

"Well, we ain't never seen anything like that in our lives an' we can't ever thank you! My, it's something to remember, that is! David, wasn't it wonderful?"

David uncrossed his legs. "Not bad."

"There you see?" Maggie cried triumphantly. "Well I s'pose now after all that, you'll be wantin' to get to bed an' get your rest. Would you have a little something to eat before you go up?"

The woman started to say no, but the man broke in quickly.

"Well, Mrs. Tweedy, if you insist, we will have a couple of pieces of your fine bread and butter. We'll just take it upstairs along. You know," he said, giving his wife a straight look, "what a fellow I am to eat a little snack the last thing before I turn in."

The woman said nothing, as Maggie hurried to cut great slices of the bread. She buttered it, laying some of the leftover ham between the pieces. She piled the sandwiches on a plate with two pieces of pie beside them.

Once up in the bedroom she turned down the bed, laid an extra quilt over the foot-board, and assured herself there was plenty of water still in the pitcher.

"Now I just hope you sleep fine. It's nice an' quiet here. What time will I call you in the morning?"

"Oh, between six and seven," Mr. Bannister said carelessly. "Well, good night, Mrs. Tweedy." He held her hand tightly in his for a moment, then dropped it abruptly and turned to adjust the shades. But Mrs. Bannister did a strange thing. She put both arms around Maggie and hugged her close for a long minute. "You're such a darling," she said huskily. And then she kissed her.

Maggie stumbled a little, going down the stairs, but she didn't let David see that her eyes were acting queer.

Then later as she tossed back and forth in bed (how could a body sleep after all that excitement!) she planned

the breakfast. She still had a crock of cooked sausage put down in lard from last year. And she'd make some of her sour cream pancakes! Wouldn't they open their eyes, though, at that? Real maple syrup for them too!

She fell happily to sleep after the turn of the night, and did not awaken until the alarm went off at half past five. She dressed quickly and went down the back stairs. She would let the tourists sleep as long as possible. David had gone on out to the barn.

She was beating the pancakes when he came in. He stood in the door and his face was grim.

"Have you woke your folks yet?"

"No," said Maggie, frightened at the look on his face. "But I'll go up now."

"You can save yourself the trouble," David hissed. "They're gone!"

"Gone?" Maggie echoed blankly.

"That's what I said. Their car's gone anyway. Cleaned out bag and baggage in the night! That's the kind of cheatin' skunks they was! That's why they picked this place. Thought we was easy, soft, an' they could get all out of us they wanted an' run! The cheapskates!"

Maggie fled from his voice, up the stairs with her heart choking her. She knocked hard on the spare room door. There was no answer. She opened it. The room was empty.

Maggie swayed for a minute. They couldn't . . . oh, they couldn't have done this! Then she saw the note fastened to the big pin cushion on the bureau. It was written on a messy sheet of some hotel stationery. It read:

Dear Mrs. Tweedy: You will never know how much we hate to do what we're doing. But there seemed to be no other way. We have barely enough to pay our gas from here to New York. As soon as we land a job we will send you your money. Meantime we tried to give you the best we had last night. With our deepest thanks until you are better paid.

SAM BANNISTER.

P. S.: Lena says whenever she can afford it, she's comin' to board a week with you.

Maggie read it twice and then drew a long breath. She went down slowly to the kitchen carrying the paper with her. David read it through, then crumpled it in his big fist.

"They hated to do it, did they? Why the meanly-mouthed cheats! Even gettin' them sandwiches last night to take upstairs along! I thought that was funny at the time. Why they got today's breakfast an' lunch too out of you! She'll come back an' board a week, will she? Well, I'm tellin' you that if ever either of them set foot around here again . . ."

And then he stopped, for Maggie stood still by the stove, looking at him with an expression new to her face. Her voice was different too. A still, flat voice.

"Some day I'll get a letter from them with the money," she said. "I'm sure I will. But even if I don't, I've been paid."

"You've been what?" David flared.

"I've been paid. Over an' over again.

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I got something now nobody can take from me. I won't be lonesome now. Times I'm workin' here by the stove I'll still be seein' them walkin' off to the orchard holdin' hands, or laughin' an' teasin' each other while they helped me with the dishes."

"You . . . you . . ." David began, but something seemed to stop him, and Maggie went on.

"An' nights here when you're sittin' glowerin' over your paper, never speakin', and the wind howlin' outside, I won't care! I'll be seein' all their show over again. I don't believe I'll ever care again whether you're crabbit or not, David."

David watched this stranger as she baked the pancakes and set the breakfast before him. Several times he tried to burst out in a proper answer to all her silly talk, but always he stopped when he saw her face. It was not hardness nor hatred that lay upon it. It was remoteness. It was indifference.

He went out, when he had finished his breakfast, still without speaking. An hour later, Maggie looking from the kitchen window saw him coming up the lane. Under his arm was the tourist sign. Of course he would take it down now! She might have known he'd do that. Her lips quivered. So everything was over and done with!

"I'll bet he chops it up for kindlin' wood, after all my work lettin' it an' fixin' it!" Maggie thought, wiping her eyes on her apron. "My, ain't life hard livin' through sometimes!"

There was no further sign of David all morning. He wasn't in the fields. He wasn't working with the team. When the noon hour came Maggie rang the dinner bell, but David did not come.

She drew the skillet to the back of the stove and started out along the path to the barn. As she passed the door of the wagon shed she glanced in. David was there, bending over the work bench in the far corner.

Maggie paused, then walked slowly into the shed. When she was near enough to see what lay before him, she stopped short. For David's hand held his pet brush and carefully with his best skill he was painting the words Tourists Accommodated on a large smooth board—painting them in yellow and outlining them in black.

Maggie could not speak. A feeling, long spent and half forgotten, rose within her breast as she watched David's head bent over his work.

He cleared his throat.

"What's the good of hangin' out a sign like that one you made?" he began at last gruffly. "If you're gonn' to have one at all, you'd better have one folks can read."

In the silence he went on jerkily:

"An' it's no good just nailin' it to the trunk of the tree. Nobody comin' by in a car can see

it till they're just about past it. It ought to hang down from an iron bracket thing, sort of swingin', then ears comin' either way could make out what it said 'fore they got to the lane. I'm paintin' both sides of this board," he added, and a minute later, "Think I know where there's a bracket!"

Still Maggie could not answer him. David fiddled nervously with his paints. At last he looked up at her, and under his beetling brows his eyes were puz-

zed, anxious. They were young eyes that she had known somewhere long ago.

"An' as to them blatherin', butter-tongued, hoof-shakin' idiots that was here, I spose we won't miss what they et. We got plenty."

And then Maggie found her voice. Her old voice, with the eagerness back in it and something else besides.

"My yes, we got plenty to satisfy us. Plenty, Davy!"

GUNS OF THE ROUND STONE VALLEY

Continued from Page 10

the valley itself. A stalemate lay upon her heart.

And up at Stop Gap Heller Sands laid before the startled eyes of Thanna Wright his first careful picture of the future. It was evening and the girl had gone down to the corral to lean against the peeled saplings and run her hands along the shining cheeks, the soft muzzles of Streaker Sands and Racer. She had a bit of sugar which she divided meticulous between them, spreading her fingers for the warm pink tongues to lick, saving the last luxuriously crumb of sweetness for the fatuous gourmets which they both were.

"You'd eat a barrel, you two," she told them, smiling a bit after her old fashion with them, "and beg for more. That's enough—stop it, Racer—let go my hand!"

"Don't blame him," said the voice of Sands behind her and Thanna whirled. She had not heard him approach, so carefully had he stepped. He was between her and the house, blocking the narrow path with his great bulk, smiling at her, but with the hard light in his excitable eyes.

"You know you're a sweet woman, don't you, Thanna?" he asked flatly.

"Not for you, I'm not," she shot back swiftly.

"Oh, yes, you are. And I want to talk to you—"

"Get out of my way!"

"Not till you hear what I'm going to say—gun or no gun. And if you try to

shoot me, you just remember that there are plenty here to swear—"

"I know," she said furiously, "the old stuff—swear anything you tell them to. It might be another matter if I shot you dead!"

"Hal! You wouldn't dare. What would you say to your mother, just tell me that?"

His eyes were sparkling, not laughing, just shining.

"She's about done for anyway," said Thanna bitterly, "one more sorrow wouldn't matter much."

For the first time a sense of the finality of this man's power came over her, the slow forcing of itself on all the little world of Round Stone Valley. Despite the stirring of its denizens, the threats, the proof, the reasons for reprisal, what had happened?

Nothing.

Fourteen men had backed down into strange and sinister silence, leaving him laughing in his mastery.

Despair stirred in her at last. She grasped the sapling with tense fingers; her knees felt weak beneath her. In the darkening of the purple dusk she seemed to see the loss of all good, all hope. Where was Brand Kenneset? And the Selbys? And Sheriff Smith and Travis? What would become of Esther?

For the first time the great courage in her wavered, bent under the odds of one girl pitted against the power which was clearing the Round Stone of its men, leaving her to his unspeakable mercy. For a wild second she feared she would lose her wits and slide helplessly down

the corral fence.

Then she bit her lips and flung up her head with the old fearless motion.

"Guess again, Heller," she said, "and now you let me by, or your rats will have a chance at that swearing!"

"Oh, that's all right," said Sands, stepping aside, "go ahead. I never meant to stop you. I'm just telling you—so you can be getting your mind down to cases. That's your future—not any fancy romance with your new friend from Laredo."

Thanna, starting swiftly toward the house, turned on him.

"Laredo?" she said, "how do you know he's from Laredo?"

"None of your business!" said Sands savagely, furious at his



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—be married. Didn't you mean that, Ben?"

"Sure I meant it then. But things change, Lily. A man can't always do as he'd like. Especially in a case like this."

He had rolled a smoke as he talked, leaning against the counter. Now he scratched a match and held it up. The pale girl, watching, drank in his handsome face with staring eyes and parted lips. It was as if she looked upon her dead, as indeed she did. Dead love, dead hopes.

He slipped the match away, let out the smoke from his deep lungs, looked at her with that withheld gaze.

"Well?" he said, but Lily did not answer.

For the first time since she had become woman-conscious of Heller Sands she talked of his slightest wish. She said nothing then or after.

She just stood and looked at him across the worn old counter, her small hands spread, pearl white, upon its surface.

Ben Sands shrugged his shoulders, as if he shied all women and their whims, and turned away, settling his wide hat a bit more carefully upon his head.

"Well, goodbye, kid," he said easily, "see you later—maybe."

He went away and Lily Brinlee stood where he left her until her father, coming over from the blacksmith shop ten minutes later, found her so. Keen with the anxiety always in him concerning her he spoke to her, and again she did not answer. Her eyes were set upon the door through which Ben Sands had walked—out of her life she knew with the finality of doom. Sam Brinlee touched her arm, peered into her face.

"Lily," he said distressedly, "what's the matter? What did Heller Sands say to you to hurt you like this?"

Slowly the girl took her hands off the counter, turned and walked away.

The old man watched her go and his heart was like a stone for weight against his ribs.

CHAPTER XIX

NEXT morning early things at Stop Gap took on a strange activity.

Sands himself was busy in the big tack house overhauling things that were stored there from round-up to round-up—blankets, gear, cook pots, a big dutch oven and a small tent they had once used for shelter in an early snow year. He told no one anything, but he sent Sheep back to the Cowboys with a list for supplies the bachelors knew they did not need, concentrated things like flour, bacon, and canned fruit; and gave him the keys of the truck to go in. The rest of the men

were out at work and only old Dad John, the chore man, was left to keep his eyes on the bunk house where young Jessup walked incessantly back and forth, his nervous hands in his pockets and out again, picking at the buttons of his shirt or at his finger nails.

Thanna, sweeping the room where her mother pattered about some task, could see the Heller through the open doors. She felt something she could not name, watching his busy hands, a tightness within her, a thickening of her throat. She felt of the gun inside her dress for reassurance. What was Ben Sands doing with the tent, the cooking things? Where was he going to need them? Still, the pupils of her eyes spread widely with a flushed excitement, the girl watched carefully.

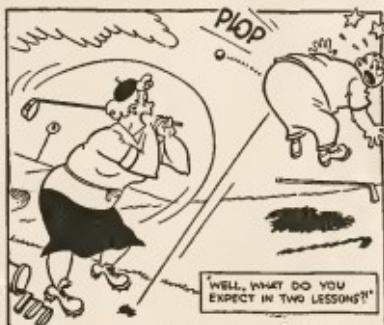
She finished the sweeping and set the broom away. She dusted the old things she had lived with all her life, her mother's organ, silent now these many years since Esther had forgotten how to play in spirit, the chairs, the few pictures. Minnie Makefent was cooking some rich mess of porridge that scented the air with comfortable promise, and she could see Dad John, his chair tilted against the corn crib, whistling idly.

An hour passed and Sands had completed whatever mysterious selections he had been making. He came out and went to the barns and she could hear him having trouble with Streaker who was stalled there. Always of late there were sounds when Ben Sands saddled Streaker—thudding of the great body against stall side or corral, oaths and the sharp cracking of the quirt. More and more the stallion was reverting to his native wildness, resenting with a sullen savagery every touch of the Heller's hard and heavy hands. Racer, too, was out of sight. She remembered she had not seen either horse outside the barns that morning.

What was Heller going to do with them?

A little sweat was in the palms of her hands. Her head felt tight, as if there were a band around it.

And then far down the valley floor, she saw the truck coming back like some crazy monstrosity of grotesque speed.



There was a cloud of dust behind it a hundred feet long and the vehicle bounced and leaped so drunkenly that it seemed it must capsize every second. Pete Shoop was a sober man or she would have thought him drunk himself. More like he had lost his mind, for no man in his senses would drive like that across an unmade road. She saw Sands come out of the barn and stand watching, saw Dad John rise and join him. Esther, too, had seen the crazy thing, and the Indian woman at the kitchen door. All Stop Gap stopped in its stride, like a suddenly silenced clock. Bounding like a ball, swerving from side to side, the truck came on. It passed the far down bend of the stream and shot up along the open straight for the corral. It tore in along the flat and rocked to a standstill ten feet from where the Heller stood. The man in its seat tumbled out and leaped toward him.

"Steady," said Sands, his eyes flaring, "what's up?"

"Plenty," panted Shoop, "every man left in this valley is gathering at the store. They've got guns—and all th' shells on th' shelves—and cars. That Kensem-feller's at their head—an' they're headin' here. They—they've got rope, too—a long new one."

He stopped and licked his dry lips and Sands caught his arm.

"Come on," he said, "Why? What's up now? We haven't done any—"

"Not we—you," panted Shoop again, "it's you alone this time. They're after you—"

"You fool!" gritted Sands, "get a grip on yourself! What you trying to tell me?"

"Lily Brinlee," said the other shakily, "killed herself last night. In the back garden. Shot herself straight through th' heart. And she left a note for Sam."

Heller Sands stood for a moment in breathless stillness, his quick mind working.

Then he leaped into action with one jump backward.

"Get in here," he ordered, "get that grub in the packs on the gray mares. Saddle Racer—get all four horses ready to run. Them follow me in the house. You'll take orders there. Don't lose your head for a second, then or later. Get going."

He left the barn on a run but slowed to a natural gait as he neared the house. His cold, excited eyes on kitchen door and window. How much had the women heard? Or could they hear this far away?

He knew in a moment, for Esther, her face worried, came to meet him.

"Anything wrong, Ben?" she asked him timidly.

"No," he said, relieved. He needed just a little time for the hair-hung thing ahead of him. His rifle and his cartridge belt in addition to his automatic which he always carried. He went swiftly and got the gun, laid it beside the door. He went into the bedroom which he no longer shared with Esther and came out

with some clean clothes. He was watching for Shoop to come up along the path. When he saw him coming he busied himself at his old desk for a moment, bending over, gaining time.

Thanna was laying down a braided rug which she had just brought in from shaking. As she stooped to place it he turned on her swiftly, tried to catch her hand. But with that warning sense of something impending which had been with her all morning she saw it coming and quivered the motion like a cat. She leaped back toward the door, her hand at her breast in the familiar gesture of defense—and the Heller nodded to Pete Shoop behind her.

"Get her," he said and Shoop leaped in and caught her from behind, both elbows at her sides. Like a wildcat brought to bay the girl fought, heels, hands, even teeth as she strained around to catch her captor's shoulder, but Ben Sands closed in from the front and calmly reached into her twisting dress and took out the gun, slipping its cord over her head. It was Brand Kensem's gun.

He put his arms around her, arms like great steel bands, and held her tight against his hot breast.

"Go get a rope," he ordered Shoop, "a soft one, not too big. And move."

Thanna Wright, done for at last, all her desperate hope and courage ground into the dust of this defeat did not scream or move in that grim grasp. She shut her eyes and held her breath and prayed as she had never prayed in all her life before.

"Oh, God!" she wept inwardly, despairing, "Help me now! Don't let him take me to the Roughs! Please, please help me now!"

Esther, a gaunt, scared wraith of a woman, staggered back against the farther wall with her hands across her mouth, the last of her reason tottering in her eyes. The Indian woman watched placidly from beyond.

Shoop came back in record time and swiftly tied Thanna's arms across her back. Sands picked her up bodily, kicked the rifle forward.

"Bring that—and those," he said and strode out and down the path without a backward glance. Where the horses stood ready and waiting he lifted her and set across her own saddle, tucking her skirts around her knees. He mounted. Streaker, caught the halter rope of Racer, hazed in behind the two pack mares and started north toward the Gap.

"You hold that outfit as long as you can," he said Shoop grimly, "and you don't know where I am."

"Long chance," said Shoop, his had face pale, his eyes wide with the portent of the time.

"I'll take it," said Sands across his shoulder, "you run things till you hear from me."

He kicked the stallion, jerked the halter rope, yelled to the mares ahead and the whole outfit headed for the Gap at a labored run.

CONCLUDES NEXT WEEK
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